

BEYOND THE ABYSS:
THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN THE WRITINGS OF
NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS AND ITS APPLICATION
TO PREACHING

by
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Joseph C. Haugh
Dean

to

Leslie and Dai who, like Dilsey, endured;
Korea, Sinai and Vietnam, my personal abysses;

and

Dr. Ronald Osborn who kindled the fire whereby a flame
might leap.

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ABSTRACT

God is encountered in mysterious ways. No two of us, his created, relate a similar story of the "meeting" whereby we believed and thus began our journey into Faith. This mysterious event we have little trouble accepting.

God is also encountered in the strangest locations. Both the Old and New Testaments relate stories of individuals confronted by God in the most unlikely places. Yet we are prone to place this event in the context of an historical past. But in casting this mystery into a once-upon-a-time, we negate the all-encompassing omnipresence of God. And we reduce our potentiality for encountering God in the myriad byways of life.

I am convinced that the careful reader who carries along the Story contained in the Canon can discover God's presence in a wide assortment of novels, histories, plays, poems and travel journals. No character may be labeled God; no site may be identified as the Holy Land; no statement may be separated out as The Word. But the story which we are called upon to retell again and again may be evident. To miss that Story's presence, to allow God's word to escape us, is to fail in the mandate of our ministry to the sojourners seeking God in a strange land.

Nikos Kazantzakis was such a sojourner. The totality of his literary works is the story of one man's search for God -- and, I am convinced, of his finding God. Yet even the infrequent sermon references to Kazantzakis fail to focus on this significant aspect which is pertinent to all persons who also struggle in their search.

Wesley insisted that his ministers be well and widely read, not only in scriptural and theological issues, but in all that reflected upon mankind's living.

It is the thesis of this project that those ministers who wish to relate the Story in new and telling ways must expand their reading to include the fulness of the classics. Nikos Kazantzakis, Greek author, poet, playwright and philosopher, is a primary source within that category.

Chapter 1.

AN INTRODUCTION

Albert Outler states that "the only really distinctive thing the Christian minister has to offer -- in its appropriate cultural context -- is the Christian gospel in its full essence, replete with its promises to transform and hallow human lives and human culture."¹ To fulfill this calling, and to do it well, necessitates a deep understanding of the Scripture and the traditions from which the Word gained and retained its form. Relying solely upon the Canon, though lifting on high the Word, may, however, couch the message in words of little significance to the hearer. For the gospel fulfills no purpose unless it is heard. Thus, the minister, though steeped in all the Biblical, historical, exegetical, and liturgical lore, may be denying himself many additional, supportive sources in a misguided attempt to remain "cultically pure", when, as evidenced in Wesley's own life, we should be about the business of wilely "plundering the Egyptians."

1. A. C. Outler, Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), 5.

Project's Intention

It is neither my intention to denigrate the mandate that the minister grasp the core of the gospel, nor demean the necessity that the preacher have roots in the revelation of God in the scripture. For without these anchors in life's wildly flowing stream, the voluminous words of secular origin with which the majority of hearers are most familiar would probably sweep us forever away from the source of life. But to be steeped only in the story of Genesis to Revelation seems to limit the potentiality for growth. If the seedlings of faith from the original faith plot are not nurtured to attain new growth, God's garden of grace is doomed. The preacher must search out new fields to tell the old story. Gerald Kennedy wrote, "a preacher needs to read novels, plays, songs, legends, and poetry. The kind of literature which is called 'imaginative' ought to constitute a large percentage of the preacher's reading."²

Thus, the preacher is always placed in a tension between a pure Word or 'relevant' words. Either alone fails to offer the Christian gospel in its full essence. To hallow and transform lives and culture, the minister must make use of both areas, ensuring that the Word takes primacy; and

². Gerald Kennedy, His Word Through Preaching (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 38.

and that the plunder fits into the originator's pattern.

These two types of reading - in vivid human literature and in rich devotional literature - will play into each other and give a man words which are strong and firm, noble and full of energy in which to speak of the deep things of men and the deep things of God.³

Scanning only the newspaper or the weekly news magazine is playing, not plundering. To plunder, one must "exploit the full range of secular literature, science and philosophy - always with a view to the enrichment of one's Christian wisdom and the enhancement of his effectiveness in communicating the Christian message."⁴ And the more one delves into the Egyptian riches, the greater one's comprehension of God's power and wisdom becomes.

Merely skimming the latest novel or analyzing the critics' columns is not plundering: for those are only chart symbols pointing to the treasure trove. And to lift one quote from one book as a brilliant sermon additive is as false to the author and the gospel as is picking a scripture text to match an already conceived sermon. As John 3:16 does not represent the entirety of the Fourth Gospel, neither does one volume of an author's works yield up the fulness of his riches. To plunder, one must immerse oneself wholly in an author's works, thereby discerning the major concepts

³. Lynn Harold Hough, The Man of Power (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1916), 24.

⁴. Outler, 5.

and following the constant threads which appear again and again. It is only then that the richness of the spoils becomes apparent, and one's ability to present God's message is uniquely enhanced.

If one listens carefully to each Sunday's sermon, one must recognize that numerous quotes are made from non-canonical sources. I will not discuss whether these sermon insertions are playthings or plunder, nor whether they truly represent the overall concepts of the original author. What I am aware of, however, is that one particular trove of priceless treasure is virtually untapped; and that specific awareness is the problem addressed by this project.

An Overview of Nikos Kazantzakis

The literary works of the Greek novelist and poet Nikos Kazantzakis encompass the entirety of man's struggle for identity, worth and eternity. Kazantzakis' life evolved about the search for "God"; "He himself would no doubt claim that his search for God was the single most basic incentive for his career;"⁵ and he approached the question of God, not from the standpoint of reason alone (for which he was academically eminently qualified), but from that of human life. His concept of God, an intense and visible thread throughout all his works, affords immense potential for preaching from the classics.

5. Peter Bien, Kazantzakis and the Linguistic Revolution in Greek Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), prologue 4.

Kazantzakis' works have been only partially examined by the academic community, and virtually not at all by the church. Though frequently quoted in classroom or pulpit, the quotes seldom represent Kazantzakis' overall intent or content. Rather they reflect a mere passing acquaintance with his novels Zorba the Greek or The Last Temptation of Christ; or they latch on to the famous concluding line from Saviors of God ("...even this one does not exist."), totally ignoring the overall theological implications contained in his complete literary achievements.

Pandelis Prevalakis, biographer and "adopted son" of Kazantzakis, and Kimon Friar, renowned translator of Kazantzakis, have only briefly touched upon this aspect of Kazantzakis' works. Even then, their tangential remarks seem unduly shaped by the two major volumes of Kazantzakis' vast output: The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel and Saviors of God. Critical reviews contained in a variety of literary publications also ignore a powerful religious statement.

John Wesley charged his preachers to be immersed in the Scripture. But he also challenged them to read widely and actively in every possible area, thereby achieving new ways to make God's word come alive; and new ways to discover God's work in the fields of human endeavors. The Fourth Gospel implies that to keep the founding event and the faith of the Christian community alive, the story must be continually retold. The works of Nikos Kazantzakis, a plunder too

long unknown and untapped, contain the ingredients whereby the story can be lifted anew. As the church continues to search for 'elevating' components, the Greek author affords some outstanding tools for the preacher of the WORD.

The passing peruser of Kazantzakis' writings eagerly latches on to the sought for attention-grabbers which seem to imply that Kazantzakis was a nihilist, a non-believer, a mocker of God. But this scanner of sentences, playing at pirate, fails to discover the treasure. For as I stated earlier, one must immerse oneself wholly in all an author's works. It is then and then only that fool's gold is culled out and the real lode appears. Consciously, in his extended repetition of his physical, mental and spiritual journeying, Kazantzakis intensely reflects Kierkegaard's statement:

In memory, in conscience, in remorse, in work at a calling, in the solitude, the Eternal still impinges upon the individual and awakens him to a consciousness both of himself and of his responsibility and of his worth to the Eternal.⁶

Assets for "Telling the Story"

Critical analysis of literary works has been carried out extensively since the first written document; therefore, I am breaking new ground in the literature-criticism field only in turning to a major author as yet unexplored by

6. Søren Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 19.

writers with a concern for religion. When preachers of the stature of Donne, Wesley, Fosdick and Kennedy constantly dipped into literature for insight, guidance and new visions, I cannot claim this particular area as a discovery of a new treasure. However, while Kazantzakis has undergone extensive literary analysis as an author, no one has totally examined his work as "a means by which God has inspired revelation and expression of truth."⁷ Too often the decision concerning the value of an author's product rests upon the human category into which the critics place the writer (e.g. humanist, Marxist, existentialist, Christian, revolutionary) rather than upon the interwoven themes which highlight the intense struggles through which each of us goes. As Mims further states, "among creative writers even those who deny the faith are often the unconscious servants of the Most High."⁸

Mims says that we have a great responsibility to discover new ways in which to retell the story. And if, as John wrote, "the Word became flesh," are not the classics in effect words representing human shape, inculcating the emotions, drives, defeats, and highest attainments through which the human may daily move? If in my reading, aloud or

⁷. Edwin Mims, Great Writers as Interpreters of Religion (New York: Abingdon Press, 1945), Foreword.

⁸. Ibid.

silently, my eyes and ears are open (and not uncircumcised as Jeremiah writes⁹) may I not be taught new things--or at least see old things in exciting new ways?

The best seller, daily newspaper and Time may bring a momentary flash as they deal with the monuments of the moment; but if preaching is to enable the hearer to see this moment as its small portion in the flow of time; to lift the hearer above the inundating muck of the secular bog; to enable, even for that brief segment of the week, a nearness of the transcendant God, then it becomes our mandate that we seek out not just the dead voices of the living but also the living voices of the dead.¹⁰ The scenery may change, the implements of tension may change, the individuals themselves are ever replaced--but the universal themes continue; and the best in literature is infused with the living waters which can still refresh us. Two varieties of reading will be of special importance for the man who desires efficiency in verbal expression as a Christian.

First, there is all that matter in books and papers which deals with living issues and actual human experience...then there are those books in which the deep things of the same have been spoken of.¹¹

John Gardner stated that literature is constantly in a battle of moral versus immoral art, a conflict wherein the creative and destructive art forces of life are pre-

9. Jer. 4:4a and 6:10b, RSV.

10. Mims, 14.

11. Hough, 23 and 24.

sented for the consumers' ingestion. Negative art, the immoral and destructive, creates a negative following which leads ultimately to nothingness. On the other hand, moral fiction generates model characters or ideas which become images for positive growth. The repetitive images, for such authors construct characters which never act out of character, reinforce the conscious and unconscious foundation and intent of the reader/hearer. The demand of the act is to create myths a society can live by, not die by.¹²

Fosdick wrote,

Nowhere are the common frustrating experiences of personal life more vividly described, our familiar mental and emotional maladjustments more convincingly portrayed, than in biographies and autobiographies, poems, novels, and dramas, and this rich storehouse of psychological self-revelation and insight has been too much neglected.¹³

Thus, to be a preacher of the One Book, never reaching out to other sources, or responding only to the houris of the hour, is to stifle personal growth, fail to enhance the potential of the hearer, and denigrate the content and intent of God's words. Far too often the thrust is to communicate, when the language of reality should be that of communion.

12. John Gardner, "Death in the Arts", an address given at the Claremont Colleges, February 25, 1977.

13. Mims, 19.

Nathan Scott writes, the true artist's language is that

into which an effort has been made to put a deep and authentic knowledge of what is involved in the life together of freemen, and it is, therefore, a language which invites us to reenter what Martin Buber calls 'the world of I and Thou.'¹⁴

The manuscripts of the month are more and more siren calls which lead the reader deeper into the morass of self, and further and further from that which is the center, not only of the universe, but of our very beings. If the Word is merely massaged by the hot-off-the-press reveries of Being-me, to what does the hearer turn when 'the me' crumbles under the pressures which no me can withstand? I'm OK, You're OK answered neither the questions in my son's eyes nor the ones in my mind when they strapped him onto the butterfly board in the emergency room; and Airport certainly had nothing to offer the victims of the 747's which crashed on the runway of Tenerife.

The literature which should be perused is that which deals not with the living of life, but of being in life; and which lifts above the trauma of the time the fact that all is well for the ultimate 'earth' toward which a God and people, both alive, are moving. When all about seems to represent dearth, death and deprivation; when the hours of the day lack significance; and the world appears to have emptiness at the center, it is the creative literature which

¹⁴. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., The Broken Center (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 3.

has its roots in the Canon and thereby extends hope, life and worth into the future: "Whenever we face life in its concreteness, and great literature does that, then we meet God."¹⁵

Yielding

to the mere process of disintegration has become an irresistible temptation, not only because it has assumed the spurious grandeur of 'historical necessity' but also because everything outside it has begun to appear lifeless, bloodless, meaningless and unreal. And, in the things of the imagination, this fascination with the Abyss is perhaps the chief characteristic of our time.¹⁶

Nikos Kazantzakis, reared in the Eastern Orthodox Church and a religious dissident, spent a literary lifetime probing into the mysteries of the Abyss, for he was obsessed by death, the beyond death, and the identity of the God who gave meaning to that beyond. His biography, autobiography, poems, novels and dramas repeat the search again and again. Knowing that I speak out against a formidable opposition, I contend that Kazantzakis, in a visible strand throughout his works, consciously affirmed both God and the joy beyond the abyss. This literary affirmation of the Creator and the unity beyond death have exceptional value for the minister who must retell an old, ever recurring story.

To preach only from the Scripture emphasizes the Creator, but somehow seems to leave adrift the created. And to preach only from most humans' intellectual derivations, while lifting up the results of the created's freedom,

¹⁵. Kennedy, 132.

¹⁶. Scott, 80 and 81.

deprives the hearers of their source of being. The Scripture, ever firm, cannot be adjusted or tampered with. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the preacher to be highly selective in his plundering. There is much enjoyable reading; there is, however, far less which possesses the potentiality of meshing successfully with the Scripture. The former I would equate with the second law of thermodynamics, and the second with Shakespeare as referenced in Schumacher's delightful comment:

The Second Law of Thermodynamics is nothing more than a working hypothesis suitable for various types of scientific research. On the other hand - a work by Shakespeare: teeming with the most vital ideas about the INNER development of man, showing the grandeur and misery of human existence...What do I miss as a human being if I have never heard of the Second Law of Thermodynamics? The answer is Nothing. And what do I miss by not knowing Shakespeare? Unless I get my understanding from another source, I simply miss my life.¹⁷

Except in my personal case, I excitedly insert Kazantzakis for Shakespeare.

It is so easy to let the great writings go by; to read only the newest novel; or concentrate solely on the latest commentary on one of the books of the scripture. Yet here I am attuned to Schumacher, for I fear this type of indulgence may be a cause for missing life: and if I miss it, do I not lead my hearers away from life also? I am convinced that the preacher has to plunge into the classics,

¹⁷. E. F. Schumacher, "How Small Is Beautiful", College New Mag, VI:1 (March 1977), 2-4.

and reflect them to the congregations as holders of all the myriad intricacies of being in life. As Nathan Scott wrote:

It may therefore be an important part of the Christian's vocation toward the literature of our period to cherish and admire, and thus indirectly to commend, some of the great examples, wherever they can be found, of the modern imagination reckoning with the world out of an acceptance of the fact that human life is irrevocably committed to time and to history.¹⁸

Critical Terms

Two terms are essential to an understanding of Kazantzakis: the abyss and God. A failure to deal with them as primary strands in Kazantzakis' works, everyman's living, and systematic theology would lead to the same false prophesying of prior literary critics.

Abyss

Abyss calls up images of a vast, bottomless, dark void; a deep pit encompassing the unfathomable and harboring primal chaos. It was an essential ingredient of mythology which has continued into the mainstreams of mankind's accounts. To enter the abyss portended severing oneself from life, from hope, from all. The Old Testament refers to Sheol as that deep to which the separated from Yahweh depart. Sheol, the barren womb, the belly whose omnivorous appetite destroys all personal identity. The abyss, thereby, welling up as an impenetrable phantasm, is often seen

¹⁸. Scott, 68.

as death, the archenemy. But this concept, denying the cross, is entirely self defeating.

Paul Tillich, recognizing the enigma of the abyss, placed it in proper relation to the other end of the spectrum, one's ultimate concern. The key to understanding is that the mystery is both ground and abyss. The God who gives us being, the God who is the ground whereon our being stands and grows, is also the God which lies within and beyond the abyss. Thus, the abyss, rather than containing all of fear's corraled creatures, is an essential construct enroute to one's ultimate destiny, unity with God. Pannenberg speaks of life as a series of unplumbed depths of events which we must continually pass, for God and God's will will only be revealed in the light of the series' end. In light of this perspective, it is clear that the abyss, while related to death, is not a void of negation. Rather, it is a passage into life, the life which Christ portends.

It is this concept of the abyss that Nikos Kazantzakis lifts up throughout the entirety of his prodigious works: a challenge to being, an enhancing experience, the confrontation with God, a passage into newness.

Abyss is what we call anything we cannot bridge. There is no abyss. There is no end. There is only that spirit of man, and this spirit names everything according to its own bravery or cowardice. Christ, Buddha, Mohammed found the abyss, but they lash a bridge and crossed over. And with them the human flocks.¹⁹

¹⁹. Nikos Kazantzakis, Journeying (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 4.

Thus the abyss is neither bottomless nor unfathomable. Rather, it is each of those decisions which we encounter daily in our struggle to be, to continue, and to attain unity with the Creator.

In the Gethsemane pericope, Jesus stared into the abyss. Perhaps he could have returned to the carpenter shop, pounding pegs in someone else's cross. He might have opted for that era's 'Canada or Sweden.' But Jesus chose to step into the abyss, enter into the mystery, and thereby bridged the gap. Paul, too, stared into the abyss. On the road to Damascus, he was confronted by a call to change. The two strands of power and glory lay before him. He, too, chose to enter the mystery and bridged the chasm. So, too, does the New Testament call upon all believers to follow; so, too, does Kazantzakis insist that, with a laugh, one plunge into the abyss wherein the Invisible permeates all things and forever ascends.

God

Tillich defines God as our ultimate concern, that factor which determines our being or non-being. While creator, however, God is not an automated controller, for the created has been provided the unique option called freedom. Through the 'yes and no' of this freedom, humans are capable of participating in the unification of God's intentional plan and the ultimate plan. Through this participa-

tion, and our openness to God's action, we are brought into unity with the creator. In creation alone was love; but in the uniqueness of freedom is a greater love, for therein is reflected God's stamp of approval "It is Good", while knowing that humanity's potential for destruction was great.

Kazantzakis' concept of God closely parallels Tillich's. God is the "supreme peak of man's desire" (ultimate concern), who provides the "seed which develops into wings" (freedom) which lift us up through the continual struggle ('yes and no') until we reach the "supreme summit of hope" (unity with Being-itself). And in the movement from the created, through the freedom of decision making, until the ascent is completed, the realization is ever present that the essence of the struggle itself is God.

Get up! You're seeking God? Here He is! He's action, full of mistakes, gropings, perseverance and struggle. God is not the force that found eternal harmony, but the force that eternally breaks every harmony, always seeking something higher. And the person who struggles and moves forward in his narrow circle with this method finds God and works with him.²⁰

For human participation is essential to bring about God's ultimate plan, to answer God's call for help, to press upward to that something higher. As Pannenberg states, "the eternity of God is itself still dependent in

²⁰. Kazantzakis, Symposium (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 79.

the future of the world."²¹ And the future of the world through the uniqueness of God's creating does also rest in humanity's sometimes uncoordinated hands. Though written as a commentary on Dante's concept of man and God, Dinsmore's quotation encompasses the essence of Kazantzakis' concepts:

He could never say, "God alone is great!" Man is great, too; he is no mere worm, plucked by a mighty hand from destruction, and changed into celestial beauty by irresistible grace. He is an imposing figure, master of his fate, fighting against principalities and powers, strong through divine help to climb the rugged path of purification and achieve blessedness.²²

Methodology

I intend to examine the discoveries concerning God made by Kazantzakis in his process of doubt, comparing the doubt and discoveries with parallel areas in Wesley, Tillich and Pannenberg. I will concentrate on abyss and God, occasionally airing segments dealing with the Spirit. Although convinced that the necessary elements are present, I will not engage in a systematic theological analysis of Kazantzakis' works.

I will compare Kazantzakis' works with parallel stories in the Canon, and indicate how they might be appropriate for preaching. In this vein, I will undertake an exegesis of a pericope from Mark and write a sermon encom-

²¹. Wolfhart Pannenberg, The Apostles' Creed (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 174.

²². C. A. Dinsmore, The Teachings of Dante (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1901), 68.

passing the exegesis and Kazantzakis' approach. The sermon will deal with the abyss, the need not only to face it but step into it; and the God who makes that step one which may be of concern, but not one to be feared.

This project will integrate certain of the theological concepts of Tillich, Wesley, and Pannenberg, with the parallel issues in the dramas, novels, poems and non-fiction documents written by Nikos Kazantzakis. As a result of this parallelism, the project will then propose that the Gospel can be told, in sermon, using Kazantzakis' views as key points.

In the autumn of 1976, Dr. Colin Morris, president of the British Methodist Church, raised the issue of other religions playing on man's dependence on God while Christianity dares to speak of God's dependence upon man. This is the main issue growing out of Kazantzakis' movement through the Eastern Orthodox Church, existentialism, Marxism, and Buddhism: we are the saviors of God. As radical as that sounds, it is central to our belief. The gift of grace was given to mankind; and in our openness to the Spirit's transforming potential for the human spirit, in the use of the particular personal gifts given to our individual beings, in our 'shaky, treacherous hand' does rest the fate of God's Kingdom.

God puts Himself at our mercy, commits Himself into our hands to exalt or humiliate, proclaim or neglect. Is not this the supreme cosmic wager, the ultimate gamble, God taking the chance that we will not let Him down?²³

Outline of Remaining Chapters

Succeeding chapters of this project will review selected concepts of the Eastern Orthodox Church (Greek), indicating how they influenced Kazantzakis' life and writings. The concept of abyss will be analyzed as it developed through the Old Testament into the New Testament, and will be explored as to how Kazantzakis integrated this into his writings; I will compare Kazantzakis' and contemporary theological concepts of God, affirming Kazantzakis' conscious and unconscious acknowledgement that God is primary; A methodology of preaching from Kazantzakis will be outlined, drawing on Wesley, Kennedy, Mims, Scott and other religious critics; A New Testament pericopae will be exegeted, leading into a sermon using certain of Kazantzakis' stories; The conclusion emphasizes that a primary source of ministerial reading and motivation is being wasted, and reaffirms the need for expansive reading by any preacher who desires to preach the message of the One Book.

²³. Colin Morris, an article in Michigan Christian Advocate, (October 1976), 9.

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UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS

Chapter 2

THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH: A PRIMAL FOUNDATION

Critics tend to view life statements much as many see a race, that is by briefly noting the end. However, the finish is ultimately the accumulation of all the portions of which the course is composed. When it is implied that Nikos Kazantzakis, though educated within the church until the age of 16, was thereafter finished with the church; and other reviewers, mesmerized by the 'shock' endings which they see in Kazantzakis' Saviors of God and The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, labeled Kazantzakis as a nihilist, these observers were occupying the position of finish-line pole sitters, totally ignoring all that had gone on in the formative pre-race training: "...nothing is taught the child that is 'childish', and so to be discarded when he reaches maturity."¹

Raymond Etteldorf writes, "In explaining the soul of the Greek people I cannot but devote considerable attention to the Orthodox Church in Greece....There is also the reality that the Orthodox Church figures so prominently in their everyday life, as indeed she has in their history, that it can be said that, spiritually, Greece is the Ortho-

¹. Elias Mastroyianopolulos, Nostalgia for Orthodoxy (Athens: ZOE Brotherhood of Theologians, 1959), 26.

dox Church."² Similarly, in piercing to the soul of the writings of Nikos Kazantzakis, the totality of his essays, novels, poetry and travel books, one cannot be unaware of the continued presence and influence of the Orthodox Church.

I am writing Spiritual Exercises, (subsequently titled Saviors of God), a mystical book wherein I trace a method by which the spirit may rise from cycle to cycle until it reaches the supreme contact. There are five cycles, Ego, Humanity, Earth, the Universe, God. I describe how we ascend all these steps, and when we reach the highest, hour we live simultaneously all the previous cycles.³

The five cycles, inherent segments which composed the Orthodox Church's position, run throughout all Kazantzakis' works. Thus, while on one level he speaks of his sampling of life, his tastings of peoples and intellects, on another plane Kazantzakis affirms the inputs derived from the early teachings of the church and affirms Etteldorf's statement about the inner workings of the church in the everyday life of Greece. "In order to understand the role of the church in the East, one must observe the home life and daily behavior of its members, for it is in these spheres that Christianity operates in their midst."⁴

2. Raymond Etteldorf, The Soul of Greece (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963), ix.

3. Nikos Kazantzakis, The Saviors of God (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 12.

4. Nicolas Zernov, Eastern Christendom (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), 267.

It is significant that Kazantzakis stipulates that "we live simultaneously all the previous cycles", for it is obvious that he does live again and again, in line and verse, those words and events which were accumulated in the first sixteen years. Though 58 additional years of life would be spent pursuing God, it was not that God never existed for Kazantzakis, but rather that his intellectual bent was to perceive the Creator in the clearest, most meaningful manner. "...all genuine faith is ultimately founded upon direct transcendental experiences. At the same time genuine faith has a natural impulse to clarify intellectually its underlying ideas."⁵ The Church professed that God was; Kazantzakis, like Job, sought not to deny God but to confront him face to face. "We call 'non existent' that which we do not desire."⁶ Then, that which we seek must be that which we desire; and accordingly, that which we desire does exist. Could, therefore, Kazantzakis state that his lifelong search was for God and deny God's existence? He himself states his own decision: "...and knowingly or not, like good shepherds bent over our crooks, we all contemplate the brimming invisible presence in the

5. Ernst Benz, The Eastern Orthodox Church (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), 53.

6. Nikos Kazantzakis, Three Plays (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 65.

manger of God."⁷

Zernov postulates that "exalting and purifying memories of childhood and youthful experience at sacrament often lead to a return to the Church after a period of apostasy."⁸ My concern is not whether Kazantzakis was in or out of the church. Nor can I discern within his writings that which might be critically perceived as apostasy. However, what is artistically illuminated again and again is that what was given seed in the early years came to wholesome fruition, bearing gifts of rare and delicate taste. No, do not be mesmerized by closing lines only or you will miss the feast which Kazantzakis provides. Or as Kazantzakis has the Abbot say in "Christopher Columbus", "Have you not read between the lines, Father Juan, to understand the unwritten?"⁹

Let us now examine some of the Orthodox concepts and, reading in and between the lines of Kazantzakis, understand the unwritten: "This nostalgia for God, at once so mysterious and so real, has opened in me large wounds and also large flowing springs."¹⁰

7. Nikos Kazantzakis, Symposium (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 21.

8. Zernov, 268.

9. N. Kazantzakis, Three Plays, 19.

10. Nikos Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 1.

Love

"If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."¹¹ Herein is a critical point upon which the Orthodox faith focuses. To mouth only Lord, Lord, but not follow up with affirmation of persons also is to fully abdicate one's understanding of God. "Orthodoxy stresses brotherly love, not only for all believers but also for all men. The idea springs from the conception that all men are created after the image of God, that Christ died for all, and that all are called to the resurrection in the new life."¹²

Dealing with an historical figure, whereby literary latitude is somewhat tightened, Kazantzakis' The Last Temptation of Christ is the epitome of his understanding not only of Jesus, but also of Orthodoxy's stress on brotherly love. Striving to fill in the human characteristics which are absent in the Gospels, Kazantzakis lifts up not the 'missing persons' of the Canon, but rather the all encompassing love of Jesus - a love which he also thrusts toward the reader as a challenge to one's own place within the family of humans. As he states in the prologue, "in publishing it I have fulfilled my duty, the duty of a person

11. 1 Jn. 4:20, RSV.

12. Benz, 150.

who struggled much, was much embittered in his life, and had many hopes. I am certain that every free man who reads this book, so filled as it is with love, will more than ever before, better than ever before, love Christ."¹³ And obviously, in loving Christ love man, and thereby truly love God.

Kazantzakis' Odyssey: A Modern Sequel, though written ten years earlier, follows the same pattern. Odysseus, by choice, surrounded himself with the most vividly portrayed crew of apparent misfits: a grizzled old sea wolfe, a sullen mountain man, a drunkard, a wastrel songster, and a murderer. Yet throughout the poem, one continuing element surfaces again and again. Despite their beginnings, despite their failures, in spite of their leavings, Odysseus loves them just as the love of Christ is depicted in Last Temptation - and in the gospels. Even as new characters, again from sublime to dregs, enter and leave the story, it is apparent that an undercurrent of love is present; for as Odysseus' soul, in that brief moment prior to extinguishment, cries out "O faithful and beloved, O dead and living comrades, come!"¹⁴, trouping aboard the death skiff come the prostitutes, the drunkards, the thinkers, the murderers, the misbegotten. For through Odysseus they had been led to

13. N. Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, 4.

14. Nikos Kazantzakis, The Odyssey (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), 744.

their individual way of creative life, one of caring, sharing, striving for man, earth, and the anguished cry of God.

"The Orthodox doctrine of brotherly love", writes Benz, "may be realized within the framework of traditional government."¹⁵ In The Odyssey, Odysseus proposed a new city which is thought out in a milieu distinct from this. For while Odysseus exudes a love for all, the population reflects only too well the attitude mankind has carried through the years. By earthquake, the city falls. Similarly it was this age-old hatred of man against man, erupting unmercifully again and again, which brought Kazantzakis back from the erratic attraction of post-revolutionary Spain, Mussoline's Italy, the early USSR, and the Germany of the 1930's to God's love of man which can only be realized as evidenced in Christ. "And as is love, so it is with hospitality, surely he who gives is more happy than he who receives."¹⁶

Name of God

"In the Bible to bless God is not a "religious" or a "cultic" act, but the very way of life. ... So the only natural (and not "supernatural") reaction of man, to whom

¹⁵. Benz, 162.

¹⁶. Nikos Kazantzakis, Journeying (Boston: Little Brown, 1975), 86 and 87.

God gave this blessed and sanctified world, is to bless God in return, to thank him..."¹⁷ Over and over Kazantzakis lifts up the name of God in what cannot be misconstrued as anything but a blessing. Created of God, endowed with talents of service to man and God, he saw about him the constant affirmation of God's creativity. "Dear God, the wonders of the world are without end."¹⁸

Meyendorff writes that "the perpetual invocation of God's name was the most appropriate means for monks to communicate with the Divine."¹⁹ Through his early church experience and his monastery retreats, Kazantzakis was well aware of this. Thus, his constant use of the name of God in his letters seems to be a deliberate statement, a continuous communication with the Divine whose form he constantly sought to discover. In 1924 he states that God will decide if he is to go to Russia; God has given the chance to talk with Eleni, who was to become his wife; may God grant that, in his literary endeavors, The Odyssey may be completed.²⁰ These are not the trivial little inserts one places in letters; his letters are too much like his

¹⁷•Alexander Schmemmann, Sacraments and the Orthodoxy (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 15.

¹⁸•Kazantzakis, The Odyssey, 688.

¹⁹•Jean Meyendorff, The Orthodox Church (New York: Pantheon, 1962), 202.

²⁰•Helen Kazantzakis, Nikos Kazantzakis: A Biography (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), various.

works, carefully thought out expressions of his deepest feelings, belief, hopes. This usage persists for over 30 years, even until the year of his death. He asks God's blessings on friends with whom he had endured earlier, harsher years. He seeks God's care for Eleni, who has shared the upward struggle with him. The name of God encompasses power, a meaning within and yet beyond comprehension. And this power and meaning surface again and again as the years of letters pass.

Icons

"To the Greek mind symbol and meaning are inextricably bound up-"²¹ Thus can be seen the significance of the icon for the Orthodox Church. Neither graven images nor mirrored images; but rather venerated symbols of God's grace and love giving meaning to the life of mankind, whatever the tribulations of the secular surroundings. Painters adhered to traditional forms and every color had a symbolic significance;²² adherence to the tradition reflected not an absence of creativity, but a concern for the artist's soul--for to trifle with celestial archetypes would condemn the artist forever. "The craftsman is the vanguard of God, the ultimate watchtower of His battle line."²³

²¹•Mario Rinvoluceri, Anatomy of a Church (London: Burns and Gates, 1966), 185.

²²•Benz, 4 and 18.

²³•Nikos Kazantzakis, Spain (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 102.

The icon, to bring forth the mystical presence of the figure portrayed, had to be filled with a specific spiritual quality: "The soul took precedence over the body."²⁴ And space was minimized, representing not the expansive view generated from the eye of the beholder but the inverted view as though coming from a transcendent locus outside behind the painting.

The spatial lines ran from the observer back to this transcendental center; from this inverted, divine perspective, the human persons in the foreground of the picture were rendered smaller than the figures of the saints who, being closer to God, occupied the greater part of the icon's surface.²⁵

This is the concept which The Odyssey, yes even Kazantzakis' own life portrays. As vivid as the characters are, as lucid as his own character becomes, they are smaller than that source which lies above and beyond them. As aware of the cast as one becomes, one never loses sight of that greater figure toward which the author points and struggles.

"The honor rendered to the image is in effect transmitted to the prototype; he who venerates the image, venerates in it the reality for which it stands."²⁶ That reality is the greater light, the light which reveals, not the characters, the painter or the author, but the light itself. Yet it can be seen in its true essence only through the cooperative undertaking of God and the human. As Father Palamas intimates, "The Divine light is the reciprocal

²⁴. Ettéldorf, 187.

²⁵. Benz, 140.

²⁶. Myendorff, 76.

action between God and man; man seeking by pure contemplation perfect union with the Triune God."²⁷ It was this union which Kazantzakis sought; and it had to be a cooperative effort, for God neither directs nor stands idly by, but calls for human response within the God-given freedom. Like the artist, the author discovers the light revealed not by what the eye perceives directly, but within the individual. "Rather than what the corporeal eyes sees, art renders what the restless eye of the soul can surmise within this visible world."²⁸ Peering through the aperture of an icon is to glimpse the celestial world; and looking beyond the words of Kazantzakis is to view the creator God.

The icon is the clue to understanding the Orthodox Theology. It reveals both God, and man the image of God, within whom is the icon of God. Thus, "at home, or on a journey, in hours of danger or in happy moments, an Orthodox wishes to see icons, to gaze through these windows into the world beyond time and space and be reassured that his earthly pilgrimage is only the beginning of another and fuller life."²⁹ Kazantzakis himself kept an icon in his study into which he would peer, searching for additional content to his writing. His writings themselves are icons pointing beyond space and time, reassurances concerning his earthly journey.

²⁷ Etteldorf, 144.

²⁸ N. Kazantzakis, Spain, 100.

²⁹ Zernov, 277.

Monasticism and Mysticism

Two additional areas of Orthodoxy which intrigued Kazantzakis were monasticism and mysticism. In life and in literature, whether by direct participation or in intellectual contemplation, Kazantzakis and his characters partook of the elements of the monastic and mystical. This does not, however, imply approval or acceptance of either in entirety, for it was mandatory for Kazantzakis to be always the honest critic concerning all aspects of life and religion: unquestioning participation in anything was anathema to him. "For Arpagos, action ultimately becomes meaningless unless it is in conscious harmony with the superior purpose it serves."³⁰

In 1914, in company with a friend, Kazantzakis spent over six weeks on Mt. Athos visiting the monasteries, conversing with the monks, and thinking. It was, in effect, a retreat which was to provide significant inputs into his life and works. "Each morn I am born anew."³¹ The ascetic life of the monks was designed to provide total separation from the world, to provide that atmosphere in which the moral and intellectual bent of the monk might be directed solely toward God. "This total devotion to God was so radical and exclusive that ultimately it took precedence over

³⁰•N. Kazantzakis, Symposium, 6 and 7.

³¹•H. Kazantzakis, 54.

one's obligations to one's fellowmen."³²

Yet, while seeing good within this concept, which included uncultivated and immoral aspects (the three temptations, "beardless boys, love of money and love of power"³³), he was aware that all creation was mutually intertwined in the process from the dark out of which it came unto the dark toward which it progressed. And if meshed in this movement, then responsible for each other. While the lure of the ascetic would be forever present, and many through the years would so label him, Kazantzakis never severed his ties with the fulness of humanity.

Whether the call came for participation in government or world bureaucracies, for more meaningful text books for children, or for food, love and care, he was one with his fellowman. He loved luxury, because that climate enabled artists to grow; but berated the well-to-do who gave nought to the have nots. And he lived "like an ascetic because he could not preach one thing and do another. The person who seeks comfort is selling his soul to the devil."³⁴ That aspect of monasticism wherein the ascetic severs himself from the world's temptations to concentrate solely upon the kingdom of heaven was repugnant to Kazantzakis. To cry 'Christ is Risen' in the solitude of a monk's cell

³²•Benz, 100.

³³•H. Kazantzakis, 54.

³⁴•Ibid., 20.

bore no resemblance to the agonizing call for help by which his God tried to stir free persons to action, creativity and unity. He was far more in touch with an earlier monastic element: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor...and come and follow me" (Mt. 19:21); he resembled more closely the state of *apatheia*, "the state of a soul in which love towards God and men is so ruling and burning as to leave no room for human (self-centered) passions."³⁵

The principles of self-abnegation are spelled out in the liturgy of consecration of a monk. After the abbot has put numerous traditional questions to the novice, he addresses him with the following formula: If you now wish to become a monk, purify yourself above all things of every taint of the flesh and the spirit and acquire holiness in the fear of God. Work, wear yourself out, in order to acquire humility, whereby you will become the heir of everlasting goods. Put off pride and the shamelessness of worldly habits. Practice obedience toward all. Perform the duties that are imposed upon you without complaint. Be enduring in prayer. Be neither lazy nor sleepy during the vigils. Steadfastly resist temptations. Be not neglectful of your fasts, but know that prayer and fasting are the way to win favor with God. ...Henceforth nothing must matter to you but God. You shall love neither father nor mother nor brothers, nor any in your family. You shall not love yourself more than God... Nothing shall restrain you from following Christ... You will have to suffer, you will go hungry, you will endure thirst, you will be robbed of your clothing, you will suffer injustice, you will be mocked, you will be persecuted, you will be slandered, you will be visited by many bitter tribulations--all these sufferings are the token of a life in keeping with the will of God.³⁶

³⁵•Mastroyianiapolulos, 190.

³⁶•Benz, 101 and 102.

When viewing the life and writings of Kazantzakis, it is obvious that he lived and wrote much within the requirements of this formula. The heritage and environment, the tradition from which he sprang did not go asunder. While Orthodoxy might move away from the job of molding the world in Christ-like fashion, Kazantzakis sifted concepts and theories, always coming back to the selfless love which gives hope and meaning to those who come after.

Freedom

If I were to sieve out one component of Orthodoxy which is singly evident as the constant strand in Kazantzakis' search, it would be the freedom of the created. "The stronger the soul and the flesh, the more fruitful the struggle and the richer the final harmony. God does not love weak souls and flabby flesh."³⁷ To say 'I believe', then languish into idle camp following is neither part of the Christian faith nor of the upward ascent which Kazantzakis took. This is the central theme of his greatest work, The Odyssey. Odysseus, the salt encrusted sea-battler, having survived the rigors of Troy and the ten year sea voyage back to Ithaca, refuses to settle into the comforts of the returned hero.

³⁷. N. Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, 2.

Even my isle moves under my feet like angry seas,
 and here I thought to find firm earth, to plow deep
 roots.
 ... I'll heave to and unballast.³⁸

Instead he accepts the challenge of his human freedom and pursues the illusive Source of life. Throughout the journey, a replica of Kazantzakis' own tortured seeking of God, Odysseus comes into contact with a varied representation of mankind. Many seek to become his followers, treading the trail which he breaks ever anew. But he challenges each to comprehend the meaning of individual freedom, to decide for themselves upon the course which they must take; for these are the ones for whom he cares most, sees as keeping closest to the mandate of the ancestors, perceives as responding more fully to the Creator's cry:

The archer joyed to see his friend raise his head high
 like a free man and spread his long wide wings for
 flight.
 He longed for the first thrust of freedom to tear
 through
 the bosoms of his friends one day like eagle-claws
 until they freed themselves from his hard yoke, and
 flew.³⁹

The cry which Odysseus heard, similar to that of which Kazantzakis himself was aware, was not the channel-buoy by which others would mark the course. For in createdness exists an individual freedom to respond, and each response must be different, for humans (and his characters) each have separate qualities and quantities whereby to

³⁸.N. Kazantzakis, The Odyssey, 5.

³⁹.Ibid., 331.

meet the challenge. "God speaks to all men, but each one hears that voice in his own tongue."⁴⁰ This is not to be seen as abandonment, for we know that God is ever present in our lives as we plod our separate ways. And like a father loosing his children, yet ever concerned about their process of living, Odysseus often reflects upon their separate existences. He experiences joy in their advances, provides support in their failures, undergoes deepest pain in their deaths: "he felt he knew each outcry of their wounded lives."⁴¹ But he never intervenes in their use of their individual freedom. For their potential ultimate goal, their possible unity with the life force, their salvation from the torments of the world, necessitates the use of their freedom. In The Odyssey as "in the Orthodox Church salvation is not considered as coming exclusively either from faith or grace. It is rather the result of a cooperation of divine grace with human freedom."⁴² As the Orthodox Church is not a militant force judging the world from an external vantage point and calling for change, neither is Odysseus a righteous judge specifying the way for his fellow travelers. Both are rather catalysts which slowly alter human life from the inside through changes within hearts and minds. This, too, is the message which

⁴⁰. Zernov, 227. ⁴¹. N. Kazantzakis, The Odyssey, 593.

⁴². Panagiotis Bratsiotis, The Greek Orthodox Church (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 29.

Kazantzakis proclaims concerning his own life: "The new land is born first inside our own heart and only then emerges out of the sea..."⁴³

Death

Death is also a crucial factor in the life of the Orthodox Church, in the life of Kazantzakis, and in his writings. Death is not maximized as the enormous evil which cannot be conquered; nor is it downplayed as the inevitable, yet inconsequential finish of earthly life. "The Orthodox Church neither minimizes the tragedy of death nor is overcome by its destructive power. It prepares its members to face it with hope and faith, but also with full awareness of their responsibility for what they have done on earth."⁴⁴

From the beginning of his writings, including the collected letters which Eleni Kazantzakis used as a primary construct of her book, Nikos Kazantzakis recognized that death was a normal part of the life process. Though he did not welcome it (there were always so many more literary endeavors which had to be accomplished), neither did he battle it. "Our lifetime is a brief flash, but sufficient."⁴⁵ Death existed and he, as all of God's creations, moved in

⁴³.H. Kazantzakis, 68. ⁴⁴.Zernov, 271.

⁴⁵.Nikos Kazantzakis, Report to Greco (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 19.

sequence from womb to tomb, recognizing that he was fully responsible for his accomplishments or failures by his participation in continuing that which God began. Whether reflecting upon the real or imagined admonitions of his grandfather, or the created marching orders of his heroed Cretan, the famous painter El Greco, the message was clearly reflective of the Orthodox dogma.

My entire lifetime I was a bow in merciless, insatiable hands. How often those invisible hands drew and over-drew the bow until I heard it creak at the breaking point! 'Let it break,' I cried each time. After all, you had commanded me to choose, grandfather (Greco), and I chose."⁴⁶

The Orthodox Panihida (a short funeral service) culminates in a farewell to the departed during which the congregation sings:

Come O brethren, let us give the last kiss to the dead and render thanks to God, for our friend has gone from his kinsfolk and rests in the tomb and he has no longer a care for the things of vanity and of our much-toiling flesh. Where are we now his relatives and friends? Lo, we have parted from him to whom Lord, we pray, give eternal rest.

To this prayer a choir responds in the name of the departed himself:

I lie voiceless and deprived of breath. Beholding me, bewail me, for yesterday I spake with you and suddenly on me came the dread hour of death. Come all that love me and kiss me, for never shall I converse with you again. For I depart unto the Judge before whom king and servant, rich and poor, stand together; for each according to his deeds is glorified or ashamed. I beg

⁴⁶. Ibid., 494.

you all pray to Christ our God for me that for my sins
I be not bidden unto the place of torments, but be
granted the light of life.⁴⁷

In the final chapter of The Odyssey, Kazantzakis follows the outline of this service in the death of Odysseus. Lying in his self constructed coffin-skiff, no longer able to row or steer, yet fully observant of the life cycle continuing in the movements of fish and fowl, Odysseus, seeking to touch again those persons who were part of his life on earth, cries out, "O faithful and beloved, O dead and living comrades, come!"⁴⁸ And the doors of his skull open, allowing all the past to rush into his mind: Greetings and embraces are exchanged--but even in their grief, they do not seek to restrain his leaving. Nor does he wish to remain ("we'll play in sunlight a brief hour and then push on.")⁴⁹ The song of death, the song of life goes on; his heart is lightened. And his mind, cleansed of the past, "soared high and freed itself from its last cage, freedom."⁵⁰

"Magic the power of speech that is capable of creating the thing, or of enclosing the created thing within clearly defined limits, so that it cannot overflow or shrink and lose its original form."⁵¹ Magic also the power of speech which, in its creation, encompasses the fulness of

⁴⁷. Zernov, 271. ⁴⁸. N. Kazantzakis, The Odyssey, 744.

⁴⁹. Ibid., 774. ⁵⁰. Ibid., 775.

⁵¹. N. Kazantzakis, Spain, 44.

its foundations so that they, too, do not ease their original forms. For while the Church as an institution receded rapidly from his life, its teachings and meaning are clearly evident in his actions and words. As he journeyed over earth's boundaries, savoring each piece of its texture and ideas, he wove their threads into the materials of Orthodoxy, affirming ever again the Creator God who calls for man to not merely follow, but to respond with a life which helps complete that which God began. His journeys and his words are his affirmation. "Traveling and confession (creation being the highest, most exact form of confession) have been my two greatest joys in life."⁵²

While Kazantzakis' education within the church ceased at sixteen, if one compares his retentive mind throughout the remaining 58 years and the manner in which all discovered matter became part of his prodigious creativity, it must be apparent that none of the early teachings were discarded. "Nothing is lost; nothing has been burned--the islands are charted deep in my mind."⁵³ What does become evident is exactly what Kazantzakis professed: the search, that looking for God which each of us undergoes.

Zernov states that "an Orthodox worships God as an artist, for he brings to the throne of his Lord and Master

⁵². Ibid., 11.

⁵³. N. Kazantzakis, Three Plays, 43.

the works of his creative imagining."⁵⁴ And that is the culmination of Kazantzakis' efforts: the artist laying his inspired creativity before God; the God with whom you and I are well acquainted.

Etteldorf states that, in viewing the Acropolis, one cannot be unaware of one's debt to Greece wherein the Faith was nurtured and matured. That the mind is struck by "the persistent, sometimes heroic, sometimes tortured struggle of man to rise above the sordid, the mean, and the shallow in order to carve out the image of the divine."⁵⁵ It is this same struggle which we perceive in Kazantzakis, a struggle given direction by the formative years wherein Orthodoxy was more of his life; A struggle in which Orthodoxy was never really absent. In the beginning and in the end, it was the artist's efforts to form the image of the divine.

⁵⁴. Zernov, 276.

⁵⁵. Etteldorf, 2.

Chapter 3

A CERTAINTY: THE ABYSS

Introduction

One is always aware of Kazantzakis' interest in 'the beginning' and in the culmination of existence. There is a constant looking back at the sources of life, a meticulous excision and grafting into the ongoing process of human existence in a created world. In addition, there is also a continual reference to the unknown toward which each of us proceeds--that dark which envelopes all persons when life's pulse ceases.

In examining Kazantzakis' pursuance of the mysterious abyss, however, one must recognize that the term's implications encompass far more than death alone. If only death was postulated as the content of the abyss, then those literary analysts who categorized Kazantzakis as a nihilist might have a more valid foundation. But Kazantzakis himself precluded such an interpretation through the varied uses which were encompassed in the term. While the abyss was that final arena wherein one's existence in this world ceased, Kazantzakis also projected it into each moment of human experience. It is this particular concept which mandates a more critical examination of the term, its derivatives, its parallels, and its confirmation of a perception of something reaching far beyond nothingness.

The Bottomless Deep

In reviewing the Christian concepts against which one must balance the images that Kazantzakis evokes, it is evident that the abyss finds ample seed root within the Old Testament. Aside from the late Apocalyptic writings, the Old Testament generated no doctrine concerning life after death. "The Old Testament offers no formal doctrine concerning the destination and fate of the dead."¹ When life ceased, as the Hebrews conceived being (a whole person uniting body and soul) the person was no more. The relationship with other persons, with God, and the self-identity ceased.

At death, God withdrew the spirit of life, the source of energy and power. And without energy and power, the human, like a light bulb, slipped into darkness. In Psalm 88, the writer likens himself to one proceeding to the Pit, having no strength, forsaken, and remembered not by God.² The source of life had turned away from him; and in the rebuff, he experienced the removal of strength, the denial of breath, and slipped into the enervating darkness. In Ecclesiastes, the dead know nothing. There is no reward, their memory is lost, and they are forever removed from the sun, that body which is representative of power, energy and life-giving.³

¹•T. H. Gaster, "The Abode of the Dead," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), I, 787.

²•Ps. 88:4-6.

³•Ec. 9:5-6.

There was a shade of the former self; and this shade had a place of being, Sheol, the abyss into which the dead passed. The dead did give up the earth, for the earth was associated with creation and life. They did not, however, relinquish existence per se, although they were oblivious to any prior life. Communion with God and with one another, and concept of self were tied to life. Once life ceased, the shadows were relegated to the bottomless, unfathomable deep.

Whether looking at a God-Israel relationship as under saving action (Van Rad) or covenant tradition (Brownlee), the relationship is inextricably linked to the days of living, with little if any thought projected beyond death. The individual approached death, feeling that he had received God's blessing of life and enjoyed it in the communion with God which transpired in living under God's protecting presence--a presence which evaporated in death: "The eye of him who sees me will behold me no more." (Job 7:7a)

"Without discrimination of race, nationality, religion, social position, and moral character, (all the Dead) go to a dark, gloomy, underground enormous cave."⁴ Everyone proceeded toward the abyss: Kings and beggars, princes and prostitutes, priests and procrastinators all trod the same pathway whereby the proximity of God slowly slipped away:

⁴Robert H. Pfeiffer, Religion in the Old Testament (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 104.

Then I should have been at rest,
 with Kings and counselors of the earth....
 or with princes who had gold,
 and there the weary are at ease.
 There the prisoners are at ease together; ...
 the small and great are there, (Job 3:13b)

Sheol was the abiding place of the dead. It was a place into which one went down, a pit, a locale below the grave (though little differentiation was made between Sheol and the grave): a place of darkness, desolation, disorder, and deep shadows, disassociated from God.⁵ And yet there were underlying currents of thought which attempted to pierce this darkness, sought to discover a means whereby the relationship of God and persons was not irrevocably erased. These were not radical reflections, for "from time immemorial man has shuddered at the idea of total annihilation when life on earth comes to an end."⁶

Therefore, while there was no escaping death, the ultimate abyss, it also became evident that Sheol was not beyond Yahweh's reach.

If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!
 If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! (Ps. 139:8)

There was no escaping Yahweh, though this still was not perceived as a comforting factor. The abyss still evoked a sense of hopelessness; while Yahweh was aware of one's presence in Sheol, there was an absence of the generative

⁵ Helmer Ringgren, Israelite Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 243.

⁶ Pfeiffer, 104.

link between man and God. But hope stirred; Hosea and Jeremiah saw God's love as greater than sin; the psalmists perceived fellowship and life with God as the ultimate value.⁷ Obviously further conclusions had to follow, conclusions which pushed the bonds between persons and God beyond death. And once this blockage was breached, Sheol had to be perceived in a new way. The abyss could no longer be the gaping, ever hungry pit at the end of life. It must, somehow, become an ever present aspect of God's presence within the realm of the living.

Perplexities of Living

One moves into the Christian Canon developed by the community of Christ, acknowledging the varied threads which extend out of the Old Testament. For as the Old Testament was a creative agent, a sacred text and source of the New Community's comprehension of a salvation history and covenant, so, too, did it provide a new shading to death, beyond death, and the abyss.

Whereas Israel recalled the lives of Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, the early Christians not only preached Jesus' death but celebrated it in the community's worship.⁸ Death

⁷ Rudolf Kittel, The Religion of the People of Israel (London: Allen and Unwin, 1925), 106.

⁸ John R. Donahue, "From Passion Traditions to Passion Narrative," in Werner H. Kelber (ed.) The Passion in Mark (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 8.

had now become a primary linkage between God and the believer, rather than a timeless separator; and it could no longer be perceived as an unfathomable void. Death, as well as living, were now included within the realm of God, for in Jesus' death was seen the final unity of Jesus and God. The energy and power, which the Old Testament theology specified as slipping away when one departed the living now extended into infinity.

Death was no longer the conqueror; the dead were no longer somnambulant shades; and the communion with God, with others, and identity of oneself remained active possibilities. What then became the role of the abyss? It seems apparent that, as the New Testament elevated Christ as the reprieve from the godless solitariness of death, it also established the abyss as an aspect of life which had to be entered, not at death, but, with God's grace, in the very activities of living. Rather than representing the uncontrollable finis, it now was perceived as those multi-confrontations of which living is composed: alternatives, choices, decisions, freedom, struggles.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he raises several issues which seem to reflect this altered view:

I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgement. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brethren. (I Cor. 1:10-11)

Here the void into which mankind falls was dissension and disagreement. The unity which Christ had afforded was distended by the tensions aroused through the varying interpretations generated by humans' self-seeking minds. Jesus had taught and exemplified one way, one mind-set, one judgment. Yet here were self-acclaimed followers rending the garments of the faith much as the soldiers tore asunder Jesus' robe.

Paul follows this up by pointing out an additional chasm into which the members of the church in Corinth have strayed--the jockeying for social position based on self-arrayed wisdom.

For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (I Cor. 1:26-29)

There is no social stratification if those who profess belief truly comprehend God's will as Jesus presented it. The community of Christ is one body, each member equally serving and being served.

Other aspects of the deep into which persons floundered, as seen by Paul, are personal associations (I Cor. 5:9-11); marriage and sex (I Cor. 7); and food offered to idols (I Cor. 8), which also opened up a wider Pandora's box of potential stumbling blocks (e.g., the believer, in

the right knowledge, partakes of an activity which misleads the unknowing). In the letter to the Romans, written by a more theologically mature Paul, the general term which more adequately describes the precepts of the abyss is sin, man's condition when he is outside an obedient relationship to God. "The acts that a man performs as a result of this broken relationship to God and the consequent lack of proper direction in his life are sins."⁹ Sin, then, becomes the new abyss, that faltering step which portends dissolution of the communion between persons and God.

The Markan Gospel also presents day-to-day encounters as the crevices which may deter those climbing the ascending way. Jesus is portrayed as an initial model of persons encountering the world's wiles. However the baptism of Jesus and subsequent total filling by the Spirit were perceived, a period of intense temptation followed--an encounter through which Jesus, in perfect unity with God, passes. He possessed a right relationship to God, a relationship which affirmed his life's proper direction.

From this initial establishment of the perfect prerequisites for moving toward total unity with God, the Markan Gospel continues to build upon a variety of choices and de-

⁹. Howard Clark Kee, Franklin W. Young, Karlfried Fraeulich, Understanding the New Testament (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 206.

cisions as potential impediments along the trail. The disciples, involved in complexities of their livelihoods, are called to follow Jesus; choose! In dealing with the paralyzed youth, "Jesus approached this man as one whose primary need was for the assurance of forgiveness."¹⁰ Moral conflicts generated guilt feelings; and the tension thereof created stress in the man-God communion. The admonition, your sins are forgiven, again presented a choice: "I am physically paralyzed and need that kind of healing" (which mandated further paralysis); or "I have sinned, I am sunk in the abyss and accepting your forgiveness frees me." The rich young ruler also encountered an abyss; and Jesus presented the counterpoints: Go! Sell! Give! Come! Follow! Choose!! Peter was represented as entering the personal abyss (Gethsemane and the courtyard) and failing. And the path to the cross was a continual collage of abysses harboring the storms of life.

Some Modern Views

The Old Testament concentrated upon living so as to perpetuate the covenant relation of Israel and Yahweh, but ultimately relegated the individual to Sheol. The New Testament called the individual to live in affinity with God in order that said unity might carry even beyond the grave.

¹⁰Robert C. Leslie, Jesus and Logotherapy (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), 55.

From the abyss of death unto the abysses of living; from final separation in depth's darkness to the possibility of living in the Ever Present Light, becoming one aflame. But the movement away from the realm of negation toward the affirming arena did not cancel out the fact that persons must continue to be in tension with life. While Sheol had been negated by the act of the cross and the faith which arose from its shadow, one could not say 'I believe' and anticipate resting upon those words while the world spun on. Participation in that world was mandated by Jesus' actions and statements; and that participation would consistently bring the believer against the edge of decision-making depths.

We are urged to have faith, but it is a faith whose strength is derived from its openness and searching. There are average places in living, sites of mediocrity wherein the zest for life is dampened because of personal problems and doubts, those abysses which appear in everyone's upward ascent. But we must be aware, and encouraged, that these wavering moments, these periods of darkness are natural segments of living which enhance a maturing Christianity. As Kierkegaard wrote,

The most important thing of all is that a man stands right toward God, does not try to wrench away from something, but rather penetrates it until it yields its explanation. Whether or not it turns out as he wishes, it is still the best of all.¹¹

¹¹ Søren Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 22.

We might prefer to jerk back from the abysses of our lives and have the world, well lubricated by Jesus' blood, turn evenly upon its axle, creating neither bumps nor sways. But Jesus' giving was not to smooth the passage; rather, it was to ensure the destination. We must step into the abysses of our lives, else we stagnate in place, seeking solace in insecurity. The security which undergirds the descent into the agonies of really being alive is inextricably bound to a grace-given faith.

Faith is a 'leap in the dark' because man would fain find security by looking at himself and yet precisely let himself go in order to see the object of faith; and just this is a 'leap in the dark' for the natural man. But this does not mean any blind risk, any game of chance, any mere random groping, but rather a knowing venture.¹²

The venture encompassed by faith, a faith which stipulates that the venture is valid and of worth regardless of whether it turns out as we desire.

L. H. Hough wrote:

The man whose eye is on the future has some peculiar mental advantages. He learns to think in the terms of the onward movement of life. He is not standing on a mountain and looking over a wide-spreading scene. He is standing in a boat which moves down a great river. The movement of the boat and the movement of the stream occupy him. There is a destination far down the stream, and toward that he bends his eyes.¹³

That river contains a variety of surprises which the wary navigator must keep in mind. The passage is not just the far look for the destination. As Hough states, the seaman

¹²•Rudolf Bultmann, Existence and Faith (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 57.

¹³•Lynn Harold Hough, The Man of Power (New York: Abingdon Press, 1916), 35.

must contend with the movement of boat and stream. Some eddies and rocks may be avoided--but the avoidance requires a decision. Other rapids and shallows must be entered--again necessitating personal decisions. Yet in making those decisions, in entering each of the rapids of doubt, it is the certain destination which affects the choice, the known quantity which generates the staying power. "A life can never come to its best until it is kindled into flame."¹⁴ It is that flame which carries one into and beyond the abyss.

The milestones that mark the road which Wesley denotes as leading to unity with God seem to infer a necessity for entering into a continuing series of personal abysses. Justification was only the beginning of the believer's travel, a journey culminating in sanctification (final oneness with the creator). Wesley contended that the abysses were the sins which man committed because of the chasm separating man's ideas and God's will. Yet the sins imply encounters with problems necessitating human decisions--and man's decisions which exempt God equal sins. "Everywhere (and in our own hearts) we see the signs of this tragic discrepancy between our visions of what human existence ought to be and what it actually ever is."¹⁵

¹⁴.Ibid., 17.

¹⁵.Albert C. Outler, Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), 29.

But Wesley was implicit that there existed a means which would bridge the gap, that would carry through the darkness and lead into the brilliance of God's presence.

This remedy is faith. I do not mean, that which is the faith of a heathen, who believes that there is a God, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him; but that which is defined by the apostle, "an evidence," or conviction, "of things not seen," a divine evidence and conviction of the invisible and eternal world. This alone opens the eyes of the understanding, to see God and the things of God. This, as it were, takes away, or renders transparent, the impenetrable veil,

"Which hangs 'twixt mortal and immortal being."
When

"Faith lends its realizing light,
The clouds disperse, the shadows fly;
The invisible appears in sight,
And God is seen by mortal eye."

Accordingly, a believer, in the scriptural sense, lives in eternity and walks in eternity. His prospect is enlarged. His view is not any longer bounded by present things: no, nor by an earthly hemisphere; though it were, as Milton speaks, "Tenfold the length of this terrene." Faith places the unseen, the eternal world, continually before his face. Consequently, he looks not at "the things that are seen;"--

"Wealth, honour, pleasure, or what else,
This short enduring world can give;"
these are not his aim, the object of his pursuit, his desire or happiness; --but at "the things that are not seen" at the favour, the image, and the glory of God; as well knowing, that "the things which are seen are temporal," a vapour, a shadow, a dream that vanishes away; whereas "the things that are not seen are eternal;" real, solid, unchangeable.¹⁶

When this God provided faith is a constant presence in the believer's life, the abysses can be entered without misgiving which enhances the move from the threshold of faith

¹⁶. John Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions (New York: Lane and Tippet, 1848, II), 18.

(justification) into its completeness (sanctification).

What were those abysses which Wesley pinpointed?

....love his neighbor (i.e., every man) as himself; he that has learned of his Lord to be meek and lowly in heart, and in every state to be content; he in whom is that whole mind, all those tempers, which are also in Christ Jesus; he that abstains from all appearance of evil in his actions, and that offends not with his tongue; he that walks in all the commandments of God, and in all his ordinances, blameless; he that, in all his intercourse with men, does to others as he would they should do to him; and in his whole life and conversations, whether he eats or drinks, or whatsoever he doeth, doeth all to the glory of God.¹⁷

Those very things which Jesus presented as being the keys to the opening into God's presence were also those which could entice the individual to make erroneous selections, thereby leading from grace to sin.

(1) The divine seed of loving, conquering faith, remains in him that is born of God. "He keepeth himself," by the grace of God, and "cannot commit sin." (2) A temptation arises; whether from the world, the flesh, or the devil, it matters not. (3) The Spirit of God gives him warning that sin is near, and bids him more abundantly watch unto prayer. (4) He gives way, in some degree, to the temptation, which now begins to grow pleasing to him. (5) The Holy Spirit is grieved; his faith is weakened; and his love of God grows cold. (6) The Spirit reproves him more sharply, and saith, "This is the way; walk thou in it." (7) He turns away from the painful voice of God, and listens to the pleasing voice of the tempter. (8) Evil desire begins and spreads in his soul, till faith and love vanish away: he is then capable of committing outward sin, the power of the Lord being departed from him.¹⁸

The gracious power of God could carry one through the abyss; or, in giving way to temptation, one might become mired

¹⁷. Outler, 75.

¹⁸. Collin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 127.

deeper in an expanding chasm. If, however, one's faith was of the deepest intensity, each abyss might become an additional generative agent in the move toward unity.

This is the implication which Paul Tillich makes when he writes that the "depth of the divine life, its inexhaustible and ineffable character, is called "Abyss."¹⁹ For as God is the mystery, the unknown (in human terms) and thus an abyss, so too, is God the ground of our being. Stepping into the abyss, confronting one's problems, meeting the tensions of life with faith, accepting God's grace therefore would refute the concept of an abyss as a thing to be avoided and present it instead as an additional possible facet in the merging of man with God. "The ground is not only an abyss in which every form disappears; it is also the source from which every form emerges."²⁰

Humans are puzzled by, yes even in fear of, unknowns. Unknowns imply parameters to our capabilities, and societally we are geared to conquering all unknowns. Yet we are aware that all answers are not in our ken; hence the propensity to avoid the abysses. But in avoidance we refute our ground of being and sever ourselves from the source which probes beyond the definite. "The trust which we need to live does not only

¹⁹. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967,) I, 156.

²⁰. Ibid., I, 157 and 158.

depend on definite circumstances, things or people--it forces us and carries us beyond these into what is indefinite."²¹

Are not the tensions of daily living representative of the indefinite and the definite? On one hand rises the image of Jesus, man fully synchronized with the Creator God--and then there are ourselves, erratically seeking the same synchronization. Life is not filled with certainties; but the uncertainties need not be pitfalls depriving us of forward motion in our Christian experience.

It is an equally essential part of man to enquire beyond the limitations of his existence as to the fulfillment of his human destiny, which is only achieved in the individual life to a fragmentary degree at most. Knowledge of the limitations provokes the crossing of them, and indeed knowledge of the limitations is not possible without awareness of something beyond.²²

Our every present moment forces us to confront the fact that we humans are limited; but the limitations demand that we seek the means whereby we can accept them or safely pass beyond. There is pain in this arena, but it need not be the agony of defeat or self-denigration. "The present is the meeting ground for past and future, the place of anguish and decision.... But a man can decide against his past habits and against social pressures, not simply as rebellion against them, but as responding to the claim of

²¹•Wolfhart Pannenberg, The Apostles' Creed (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 3.

²²•Ibid., 105.

truth, of the neighbor, or of some ideal possibility. Then life means growth, freshness, and intensification."²³ In the abyss, if one is grounded in faith, one's maturity may be heightened, and newness and a deeper sense of being engendered. But the encounter can only occur if one responds to a call from beyond, God's cry for mankind's help in furthering the realization of final kingdom. "The call forward is toward intensified life, heightened consciousness, expanded freedom, more sensitive love, but the way lies through the valley of the shadow of death."²⁴ And this valley is composed of segmented occurrences, the daily abysses through which each of us, with the support and grace of our Source of Being, must attempt to pass.

Kazantzakis' Abyss

This is the abyss about which Nikos Kazantzakis wrote; the tensions of living which try persons' souls, the seasons of darkness and light, the perplexities without which human freedom would be meaningless. To avoid them is to deny our own humanness; to fear them is to deny the Creator; to enter them in exultation is to affirm both self and God.

In the opening scene of Christopher Columbus, the Abbot says, "God listens only to the prayer of the hungry;

²³. John B. Cobb, Jr., God and the World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 49.

²⁴. Ibid., 56.

and we, Captain, do not cling to these cliffs of the Atlantic like barnacles, to eat and grow fat, but to fast and pray. The world has rotted; it's crumbling, and only prayer can keep it from falling into the abyss."²⁵ This is the epitome of the abyss-avoidance syndrome which Kazantzakis so despised. Although he was intrigued by the spiritual qualities which monasteries encompassed, he was even more certain that the human process had meaning only insofar as humans fully participated in it under any of its trying circumstances.

Thus the Stranger (Columbus), arriving at the Monastery of the Madonna of the Atlantic, and queried about his past, acknowledges that he has sailed many seas: north to Thule, east in the Mediterranean to the Grecian isles, south to Africa. But these were mere lakes--"I am smothering; I must set sail to transcend the boundaries!"²⁶ The abbot chastises him, for pride is one of the seven deadly sins. The Stranger responds, "One of the seven sins, holy Abbot, is humility, that quality which makes men say, "I am all right here, I am worth no more than this, I will go no further!"²⁷ If newness of life is to be discovered, if God's given freedom is not to atrophy, if the earthly paradise is to attain fruition, man must step into the unknown. And whether or not that which lies beyond the barrier is that

²⁵. Nikos Kazantzakis, Three Plays (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 12.

²⁶. Ibid., 26.

²⁷. Ibid.

which the traveler anticipated, the movement forward is good for man and God have joined again in a venture of faith.

In the sea voyage, the Abbot says, "We have passed the boundaries of God. We are in a whirlpool; our ship is sinking in the abyss!" Columbus, laughing, responds, "Yes, yes, our ship is sinking in the abyss; ... the soul leaps from whirlpool to whirlpool and dangles there, and the final whirlpool is God!"²⁸ The abyss is present in each moment of living; but in proceeding from abyss to abyss, we must ultimately cross the final void and realize unity with God. And rather than negating humanness, this step into the abyss is wholesomely self-affirming. The abbot evokes the image of dreaded death, an abyss separating man and God. But Columbus stresses the abyss as indicative of more than death; and his laughter is Kazantzakis' also--a joy which is utterly opposed to the apathy of Camus or Sartre (for those who mistakenly perceive nothingness in Kazantzakis' works).

Zorba the Greek is a continuous cacophony of alternatives, choices, decisions, freedoms, struggles, and salvation: the abysses which give substance to living, that enable the body to join exuberantly in the dance of life. And laughter accompanies each entry, for a forward moving life is filled with joy. When Zorba meets the young writer, who is reluctantly making a trip to an outer island, Zorba's words

²⁸. Ibid., 82.

and ways create laughter. The initial chasm will be breached in joy. And in the finis, Zorba, rising from his death bed, rushes to the window. "There, he gripped the frame, looked out far into the mountains, opened wide his eyes and began to laugh."²⁹ God, with his sponge full of cleansing, life-enhancing water, had wiped away the marks Zorba accumulated in struggling through the abysses.

In Saint Francis, Brother Leo, the writer of the story within the novel, writes: "In order to mount to heaven, you used the floor of the Inferno to give you your momentum. 'The further down you gain your momentum,' you often used to tell me, 'the higher you shall be able to reach.'"³⁰ Not to wallow in self-pity outside the abyss; not to edge into it in trepidation; but to enter enthusiastically, because that which lay beyond also accompanies one upon the journey. In and beyond the shadows, one may move into expanded freedom, heightened consciousness, and a more sensitive love. The abysses of life do not stifle the human process, but rather open doors into newer, more creative avenues. Rather than establishing dampening parameters upon man's freedom, do not the chasms encountered in living throw open an expanded awareness of ourselves and God? The Odyssey is just that, a continual series of abysses which radically refine the character of Odysseus and move him toward the ultimate unity:

²⁹. Nikos Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), 311.

³⁰. Nikos Kazantzakis, Saint Francis (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 21.

As a low lantern's flame flicks its final blaze
 then leaps above its shriveled wick and mounts aloft,
 brimming with light, and soars toward Death with
 dazzling joy,
 so did his fierce soul leap before it vanished in air.³¹

The affirmed self rose out of the shadows of death into a
 far greater freedom.

This concept also holds true in Kazantzakis' non-fiction works. If man opts for the easy, chooses not to test himself, then he must always remain separated from God. "The Hero of any race always sets the Impossible as his goal, but quickly the masses invent little expediences, convenient goals within easy reach, and are relieved. But we should always set the Impossible as our goal."³² Where does the impossible exist? In and beyond the abysses. The Impossible is the unknown; and if one chooses to label it ever the Impossible, then it and the self will always remain unknowns, fully negating self and God. A bow unbent projects no shafts; and one but weakly pulled propels the arrow only within one's reach. Ah, but to bend the bow to its maximum --then unknowns are reached, for the shaft speeds across great distances.

Each man has a certain set of things he must free: his animals, his land, the tools of his trade, his body and his brain. He has a duty to liberate all these. How? By using them and cultivating them. If he does not liberate them he cannot liberate himself.³³

³¹ Nikos Kazantzakis, The Odyssey (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), 743.

³² Nikos Kazantzakis, Journeying (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 95.

³³ Ibid., 176.

They cannot be used or cultivated if the abyss is avoided; nor can they be liberated. Freedom is a thing of joy; hence, to enter the abyss cannot be a matter of coercion or fear. It exists, the human exists; and their mutuality is part of the ongoing process which carries the universe from creation to unity anew with the creator. Coveting one's mind and body only imprisons oneself. Using them to deal with the impish impingements, the festering frustrations which are layers of our lives, may carry mankind into freedom.

In Symposium, a work which laid out much of the ground Kazantzakis would cover in his literary endeavors but which was not published for nearly fifty years, Kazantzakis gave shape to the idea of the abyss. Living in a world in flux, in a nation staggering from under the yoke of enslavement and rising from war's rubble, he did not retreat into an intellectual ivory tower (an idea with which he toyed several times, but always rejected) but plunged into the realities of giving new life to Greece and the world.

In seeking to relate past, present and future, in struggling with the conflicts and problems of a wobbly world, Kazantzakis sought the "essence of the struggle--God."³⁴ The abysses were integral to man's response to God and the process of moving toward ultimate unity. They buffeted,

³⁴. Nikos Kazantzakis, Symposium (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 11.

delayed, detoured, sometimes defeated the human aim; but the experience of the abyss enhanced rather than negated the journey. "I fought as best I could, widening the circles of my vision, conquering my individual vicissitude, to breathe the acrid air of God."³⁵ The unknowns affirmed the self, generated a forward moving life. That was where God was found: not in the harmonies we might covet, the gentle pools unsullied by leaf or breeze; but in the surging seas, the raging life where mistakes, gropings, struggles and perseverance encounter each other.

Don't expect to give birth to anything by yourself. You will raise yourself only by struggling with men, pitying and despising our miserable heart. Come, whole, with all your weaknesses, misgivings and illusions. You will be purified by struggling.³⁶

Heightened awareness and ultimate freedom lay beyond the shadows.

Perhaps Kazantzakis best summed up the confrontation of man and the abyss in a letter to Eleni Samios (later Mrs. Kazantzakis) written in 1926:

This life is awesome, mysterious, above our own power, and in order to preserve the unity and elevation of our spirit, we have to make an incessant, laborious effort. There is an inhuman law, superhuman, governing the world. And if we want to embrace it within ourselves and endure it, our heart must break.³⁷

³⁵. Ibid., 22.

³⁶. Ibid., 79.

³⁷. Helene Kazantzakis, Nikos Kazantzakis (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 142.

Chapter 4

THE QUEST: GOD IS

Overview

"The mind shouts: 'Only I exist!' And after me, nothing." Thus in The Saviors of God, Nikos Kazantzakis stated a personal approach to life which his literary works and physical progression through the years seemingly affirmed. Within the ascetic's 'miniscule wool sack' which held his well-used working tools, there was no room for the burdensome cumbrances of ordinary men's conceptions of things, ideas, friends or family. "He struggled his life long to free himself, one after another, from the many shackles with which man has bound himself." "No shade accompanies me. Only my own, long drawn-out, deep black ascending." And the lonely ascension required but the most basic necessities: his ever-magic eye, his whirlwind mind, and his soul-shaping hands."¹

It might seem that herein was developed an unshakable framework upon which to base Kazantzakis' supposed refutation of God: the "great, sublime, and terrifying secret: that even this one does not exist."² Yet, if the

¹Robert Wessman, "A Son Also Rises", (unpublished manuscript, School of Theology, 1973), 1.

²Nikos Kazantzakis, The Saviors of God, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 131.

path into and through the abyss was to have any meaning (i.e., the preservation of the unity and elevation of one's spirit), then that superhuman law which governed the world that Kazantzakis perceived must have somehow come about through that entity, which he refers to by a variety of terms, God. Man alone was unable to bring the universe into being or set it in motion; man alone is unable to sustain the contrived progress of the created; and man was unable to provide that incentive which led to the upward ascent and gave impetus to the candle's last flickering soul which, like an arrow, sped heavenward. And these are critical elements which surface in his prose, his poetry, his critical analyses, and in his travel 'reminiscences'.

The Odyssey is a compendium in which these agents are constantly at play with one another. In it Kazantzakis "confronts his hero with every major option available to contemporary man. Yet only gradually does the reader ... come to realize that this journey is a spiritual pilgrimage, a journey in quest of salvation. With devastating honesty the poet struggles with various conceptions of God and opts boldly for an interpretation of salvation as human freedom. He comes to no orthodox Christian conclusions, yet in a remarkable way he speaks not only to, but also for, the Christian in a time of great spiritual confusion."³ Perhaps

³ Ronald E. Osborn, "A Modern Man's Search for Salvation," (Encounter, 35 (1974), 123.

The Odyssey does not present an orthodox solution; yet because it does speak to the Christian, it does encompass more than mere emptiness. And because it is but one of Kazantzakis' vast literary outputs, I contend that the totality of his productivity, while repeatedly reflecting the same general story line, does affirm a conception of God which is not alien to orthodoxy.

Kazantzakis "was a very religious man but did not belong to any religion. He sought a God, or better, his maestro (master), his duca (leader), whom he encountered successively in Christ, Buddha, Lenin, Odysseus without adopting any one, always seeking to reconcile the irreconcilable. The leit-motiv of his work, as he said, was his struggle for the achievement of the various forms of freedom, political, religious and intellectual."⁴ I believe that his continual struggle for freedom in his religion, a struggle which generated open hostility and alienation toward him by the Greek Orthodox Church, also blinds the eye of the beholder to the God who does appear again and again in his writings. So accustomed are we to asserting that 'God is', and fearing any deviation from the initial 'character' description, we are deadened to one who raises doubt after doubt, yet never ceases searching. And as Wesley, Pannenberg and Tillich all

⁴. Nikos Kazantzakis, Japan/China, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 381.

point out in their developed theologies, doubt is a necessity, a vital indicator that the avenue is open for humans to encounter God. Through doubt may come the natural revelation of God. Kazantzakis' search is an excellent representation of a remark of Origen:

Human nature is incapable of itself of seeking God and finding him securely without his help. He can be found only by the man who admits that he needs him and he reveals himself only to those to whom he will.⁵

The writings of Kazantzakis are a continual admission of the need, the search for God. They are also the record of the encounter.

Odysseus (a thinly-veiled Kazantzakis) does select human freedom as salvation. Yet in our theological confrontations it is asserted that God and human freedom are inextricably intermeshed. As Tillich notes, "the creation of finite freedom is the risk which the divine creativity accepts."⁶ It is also the avenue for the encounter; for as Kazantzakis wrote, "what else is freedom but obedience to a hyperindividual rhythm?"⁷ Thus, freedom is the risk which the divinely created must also accept. Through freedom comes discovery and assurance, or missed connections and

⁵•Panagiatis Bratsiotis, The Greek Orthodox Church, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 27.

⁶•Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), I, 269.

⁷•Nikos Kazantzakis, Journeying, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 15.

anxiety. The freedom that Kazantzakis espouses consistently revels in human-enhancing discoveries and, like his heaven-seeking arrow, lifts up something beyond hope.

Perhaps the single criterion which beclouds the issue of that which Kazantzakis perceived beyond the abyss is a singular definition of God. Yet this is the issue which is even yet pricking the thin skins of every denomination. Bishop Kennedy zeros in on the problem: "No satisfactory definition has ever been found, nor can it ever be found, for God, religion, love, or man. But the reason is not that these things are vague, but that they are absolutes."⁸ Yet each of us must struggle to give voice and definition to that which gave us form; and each of us sees that Creator through eyes in separate instances. "Men are led to speak of God by different features of their existence."⁹ And as one's existence expands through travel, acquaintances, or the freedom of the created, the definition alters. "Even from the expired symbols of religion, you can gather impetus for your own divine attempts and give a contemporary form to the eternal passion of God and man."¹⁰

Paul Tillich labels God as "our ultimate concern ... that which determines our being or non-being... . 'being'

⁸.Gerald Kennedy, His Word through Preaching, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 23.

⁹.John B. Cobb, Jr., God and the World, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 20.

¹⁰.Kazantzakis, Journeying, 5.

means the whole of human reality, the structure, the meaning, and the aim of existence."¹¹ Pannenberg refers to God as "the creator of the still unplumbed depths of events."¹² Kazantzakis' search for God was his ultimate concern: politics, economics, demotics ran parallel courses; but the determination of the expanse of human reality and existence was superior. I believe the abyss was the unplumbed depth of events into which we are called by the creator to plunge, thereby creating one more bridge toward God's eternity, an eternity which "is itself still dependent on the future of the world."¹³

And that, perhaps, is why the search cannot end; why doubts are enhancing rather than debilitating; why Kazantzakis is misconceived. We are too eager to rest at the first plateaus of our ascents; but as he says, "there is no summit, there is only height. There is no rest."¹⁴ And "the essence of the struggle--God."¹⁵

There is a softness, a reverent quietness in the manner in which Kazantzakis attempts to characterize his God. His awesome literary offerings afford so much from which to

11. Tillich, I, 14.

12. Wolfhart Pannenberg, The Apostles' Creed, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 43.

13. Ibid., 174.

14. Kazantzakis, Journeying, 95.

15. Nikos Kazantzakis, Symposium, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 42.

glean that conquest, victory, suffering, and rape and pillage divert one's attention. The immense scope, the huge deposits of the secular lead the unperceiving to nada. But if the eye is focused; if the ear is attuned; then one sees and hears, not the clamoring of the world, but the quiet place of one man's encounter: "Kyrie ... Kyrie ... murmured Arpagos softly to himself, ashamed of being overheard."¹⁶

Creator

An essential characteristic which Kazantzakis attributes to God is that of creator. Shape, form, essence, possibility flow from the divine into the created. It was this awesome reality which constantly grasped the Grecian author, for he was aware that as a lesser creator, he, too, was similarly responsible for his products.

"If we open a riverbed by writing or acting, reality may flow into that riverbed, into a course it would not have taken had we not intervened. We do not bear full responsibility, naturally, but we do bear a great part."¹⁷

This concern about the possibilities of words altering directions, reshaping forms, creating new forms reached far beyond the normal literary involvement with the power of letters. The struggle of writing was not only for the beauty

¹⁶. Ibid., 14.

¹⁷. Nikos Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 435.

of the product, but also the deliverance--deliverance from the personal inner darkness, deliverance into a triumphant light of a future. And that future glow had a definite relation to the Creative Force which had launched the universe in its initial orbit.

"As I wrote ... this terrible responsibility never left my mind. Verily, in the beginning was the Word, before action. The Son, only Son, of God: the spermatic Word which creates both the visible and invisible world."¹⁸

God was, and out of God came both that which we can and cannot perceive. Most humans struggle with the difficulties of the seen; Kazantzakis ascended another level and, combining the hidden with the visible, saw God actively binding them together. God was not an inert observer, a shadowy veil screening some obscure, meaningless past occurrence. Kazantzakis saw God in the same light as Myendorff: "The Christian God therefore is not the 'unknown God' venerated by philosophers, but a living God who reveals himself and acts,"¹⁹ a God who takes the most mundane and works it into wonders.

I know of no animal more disgusting than the mouse, no bird more disgusting than the bat, no edifice of flesh, hair, and bones more disgusting than the human body. But think how all this manure is transubstantiated and deified when God is embedded in it--the seed which develops into wings.²⁰

¹⁸. Ibid., 436.

¹⁹. Jean Myendorff, The Orthodox Church, (New York: Pantheon, 1962), 194 and 195.

²⁰. Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, 460 and 461.

This concept runs throughout Kazantzakis' novel, Saint Francis. Granted that Francis historically is closely related to the creations of God, but Kazantzakis specifically stated that there were literary alterations to match life and myth; that this was the right of Art. But the protagonist, the teller of the tale, Brother Leo, bears close resemblance to the God-seeker, Nikos Kazantzakis. Thus the teller of the story is also the liver of the greater story. When the birds sing, or the forest provides mid-day cooling, or the moon and stars gleam lustrously, it is Brother Leo who ascribes the creation of these miracles to God. God, a force for which words are inadequate. It is Francis, the one nearer to God's breast, who labels Him Father.

God produces the nourishment for soul and body. But God also generates the force which puts both into motion. Again and again Kazantzakis derives intense satisfaction from his recognition of this primary aspect. In Toda Raba, he writes

I love the first descent of the Spirit, the violent event that brings the fire. The sequel, the way that the dread moment gets channeled into a good everyday routine, holds no inordinate interest for me. My deepest joy is to see how the mysterious force takes hold of man and shakes him like a lover, an epileptic or a creator. Because, as you know, I'm not interested in man but in the being that I so imperfectly designate as God.²¹

But it is in Report to Greco that Kazantzakis makes his deepest statement concerning the Creator.

²¹ N. Kazantzakis, Toda Raba, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 212.

Blowing through heaven and earth, and in our hearts and the heart of every living thing, is a gigantic breath--a great Cry--which we call God. Plant life wished to continue its motionless sleep next to stagnant waters, but the Cry leaped up within it and violently shook its roots: "Away, let go of the earth, walk!" Had the tree been able to think and judge, it would have cried, "I don't want to. What are you urging me to do! You are demanding the impossible!" But the Cry, without pity, kept shaking its roots and shouting, "Away, let go of the earth, walk!"

It shouted in this way for thousands of eons; and lo! as a result of desire and struggle, life escaped the motionless tree and was liberated.

Animals appeared--worms--making themselves at home in water and mud. "We're just fine here," they said. "We have peace and security; we're not budging!"

But the terrible Cry hammered itself pitilessly into their loins. "Leave the mud, stand up, give birth to your betters!"

"We don't want to! We can't"

"You can't, but I can. Stand up!"

And lo! after thousands of eons, man emerged, trembling on his still unsolid legs.²²

The growth of humans is synonymous with the initial creative act. We have been created, and we are called upon to go onward in spite of all the impediments we may see in the roadways. But beyond the blockages lies that which began all. Kazantzakis concludes the above description of creation:

Man calls in despair "Where can I go? I have reached the pinnacle, beyond is the abyss." And the Cry answers, "I am beyond. Stand up!"

The Stranger states in "Christopher Columbus", "St.

²². Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, 278 and 279.

Christopher is my traveling companion and protector; together we will carry Christ over the ocean. God has called to me. I obey him."²³ The worm, the stranger, the author: God called and each arose.

God of All

Although initially reared within the Greek Orthodox Church, and further engrossed with the "wrathful" God of the Old Testament, the God within the writings of Kazantzakis transcends all religious traditions, for he encompasses everything which the human can experience through the senses: rocks, mud, plants, birds, animals, and all the myriad strands of that constantly changing element, mankind. And the parts have ultimate meaning only through the unifying feature of this Force, which brings each piece out of the void and urges it forward, merging with all others, in a progression toward further abysses. "God is the power of being in everything, and above everything, the infinite power of beings."²⁴

While Kazantzakis may stipulate that each element must assert its particular freedom to actualize its own destiny, each one of his works emphasizes the continual interplay of all elements. Odysseus may die alone, spread Christ-like upon an iceberg, but the being seemingly crying, 'I did it my

²³•N. Kazantzakis, Three Plays, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 25.

²⁴•Tillich, I, 236.

way' incorporates the essences of each thing and person he encountered along the way. Zorba, whom Kazantzakis saw as a high example of the great independent, also took into himself portions of each thing he rubbed against. And Saint Francis is the essence of the birds, animals, Brother Leo and Sister Clara. Even to do it one's own way necessitates being but a part of a greater entity. "Those who see the parts (of the whole) as incomplete, as pointing beyond themselves to ever more encompassing wholes see the entirety as that whole in which/by which the parts have their being."²⁵

In Saint Francis, as Francis dies, Brother Leo's mind wanders. He sees Francis dying, alone, in an unknown, brilliant green land. The air congeals, and the twelve original brothers of the order appear; then thousands of tonsured friars; then oxen, horses, dogs, sheep; then wild animals; then thousands of winged creatures; and then thousands and thousands of angels. All the elements of Francis' life, all creatures of the whole. And is not the death of Odysseus a parallel, merely changing the color from lush greenery to the stark white of glacial ice? Date, apple, fig trees; seeds and herbs; deer, ants, goats, bears, elephants; eagles, snakes, worms; all the beings with whom Odysseus had shared his journey:

²⁵. Cobb, 21.

All four great castle doors burst open, and all guests
trees phantoms, beasts and men, all wearing festive robes,
massed in the streets and courtyards of his spacious
brain.²⁶

The death of Manalias in The Greek Passion also repeats this motif. The shepherd lad, who loved his sheep, becomes the village's Passion Christ who loved all mankind more. Though not stated as explicitly as in Francis and The Odyssey, the reader is aware of the sheep, the Turkish Agha, Youssaufaki (the Agha's dimpled, pretty boy), Priest Grigonis (his slayer), Yannokos' donkey, the rabble followers of Priest Fotis, and the Turkish army. They are present not merely because Kazantzakis created them as players in his 'show', but because these were the creatures of God in a real world which he experienced, and savored, and offered to all mankind. The little old woman may cry,

The name of this fine young man was written in the snow;
The sun has risen, the snow has melted and has borne away
the name upon the waters²⁷

but it is evident that Kazantzakis has once again offered his readers a view of "the smiling face of 'God', who loves man and is made of earth, water and human sweat."²⁸

His travel journals further underscore that this is a God for all seasons, for all beings. Whether at Sinai, like a

²⁶.N. Kazantzakis, The Odyssey, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), 746.

²⁷.N. Kazantzakis, The Greek Passion, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), 432.

²⁸.Kazantzakis, Journeying, 100.

lunar landscape, or in the quiet of a Japanese rock garden; whether in a quiet English cathedral, or at a bordello in one of 1930 China's cities; whether talking to Albert Schweitzer or Mussolini; whether rich, poor, free or slave, these are the accumulated creations of God; and in seeing the totality of the creation, in sweeping this into his own creations, Kazantzakis was in touch with God. "The understanding of God as the whole can lead to the sense of participation of the divine Being."²⁹

The Challenger

The character of God most highly visible within various literary strands of Kazantzakis is that of challenger. To gain existence, to live, and to die are never perceived as passive elements wherein persons leisurely transit an allotted time. Each moment, each segment of the journey, the traveler must reckon with the call to action, to respond, to pass through the abyss and continue the ascent. And this ascent, during one's lifetime, has no plateau; there may be pauses, there may be ledges for rest, reconnoitering, reconsideration of options--but the height always looms, and the call forward is ever present.

The Odyssey and Report to Greco present the most comprehensive overview of God's challenge. While one is fiction

²⁹. Cobb, 30.

and the other autobiographical, it is apparent that both present the same overview. The time frames are different, but the old sea battler is but a thinly veiled study of Kazantzakis. The challenge is, in fact, the impetus which launches the Odyssey; for while Homer's Odysseus returns to home and hearth, relishing that which was held back by the lost years, Kazantzakis knows that the return is but a ledge whereon to draw breath and prepare for the next climb.

Even my isle moves under my feet - like angry seas,
and here I thought to find firm earth, to plant
deep roots!³⁰

As he experienced his own life, Kazantzakis alters the Homeric character "from a cunning, imperturbable home-body, to 'the man who has freed himself from everything;' the man who avidly undertakes again a journey which encompasses not personal gain, glory, or that seaman-sought separation, but 'the turbulent quest of the modern man for new questions and new answers.'"³¹ Life is empty if one ends a revelatory experience in retirement, for the experience is a challenge to move onward. To place roots is to waste the experience, to deaden the soul, to fail to bridge the chasm.

The ideal, if it wants to renew the face of the earth, must stand much higher than the power of man. In this rests its secret strength, the full, the painful straining of the soul to reach it, that formidable lifting upward that enlarges the stature of man.³²

³⁰•Kazantzakis, The Odyssey, 5.

³¹•Robert Wessman, "A Taste of Honey" (unpublished manuscript, School of Theology, 1974), 9.

³²•Kazantzakis, Journeying, 12.

The ideal, the ultimate concern, calls mankind ever onward. The soul's progress is painful, for gain comes not without labor; and man's stature cannot be enlarged if he remain teetering at the brink. The voice calls, "cross over"; I falter, and plead that there is no bridge. "Then build," comes the response. And each experience, each new discovery, each painful wound becomes the material with which I build.

O Sun, my quick coquetting eye, my red-haired hound,
 sniff out all quarries that I love, give them swift chase,
 tell me all that you've seen on earth, all that you've
 heard,
 and I shall pass them through my entrail's secret forge
 till slowly, with profound caresses, play and laughter
 stones, water, fire, and earth shall be transformed to
 spirit.³³

All that surrounds us has the potential to expand our personal horizons, to enlarge our persons, and to open us to the translation of spirit into Spirit. We are called upon to see, to hear, to experience--and to use these amazing events as stepping stones forward. And in moving ahead, in passing through the abysses, in challenging the structures which deny, denigrate, destroy, we answer God's challenge. And while we might prefer to ignore it, his challenge is ever present.

In Journeying, Kazantzakis wrote, "I am traveling at a time when man's soul, enslaved to the machine and hunger, struggles for bread and freedom."³⁴ As I look around at my world, nearly 50 years later, can I say other? The wheels

³³•Kazantzakis, The Odyssey, 1.

³⁴•Kazantzakis, Journeying, 29.

have turned, technology has cast us out amongst the stars (those beloved stars which Dante envisioned as giving mankind a focal point in a journey toward God)--yet machines and hunger are still mankind's captors. As it was God's challenge, which Kazantzakis so wisely perceived, so does it remain my challenge--and yours. And our freedom comes only as we step forward in acceptance of the challenge.

One becomes free from the powers of existing institutions including moral laws by living toward and out of a new and far more demanding reality.³⁵

God does challenge us. Each moment of our personal existence becomes an opportunity to hear and to respond. "But there is security in the known, the familiar, the sameness," we exclaim. Yet it is a false security, a demeaning security, an enslavement. To respond requires courage--and that courage is available in the newer reality. "Ultimate courage is based upon participation in the ultimate power of being."³⁶ Even denying that there is a challenge is rather an affirmation of its presence--and a belittling of ourselves. For rather than 'jamming' God's challenge, we instead highlight our inabilities to answer. We stare into abysses and are terrified--of ourselves. Once paralyzed, there is no motion for each moment calls us forward.

The present moment was always a time for decision required by the coming of the new reality and made possible by the radical forgiveness of all that was past.³⁷

³⁵•Cobb, 46.

³⁶•Tillich, I, 273.

³⁷•Cobb, 44 and 45.

Thus, both the challenge and the power are generated by the same source. Our paralysis can be overcome, the gap can be bridged, and we can attain ultimate freedom. But we must respond, aware that pain, anguish and loss are elements of the journey. And each of us has the potential to answer.

Every man worthy of being called a son of man bears his cross and mounts his Golgotha. Many, indeed most, reach the first or second step, collapse pantingly in the middle of the journey, and do not attain the summit of Golgotha, in other words the summit of their duty: to be crucified, resurrected, and to save their souls. Afraid of crucifixion, they grow fainthearted; they do not know that the cross is the only path to resurrection. There is no other path.³⁸

Source of Growth

If God challenges and persons respond, then the potential for growth, both personal and within the entire realm of humanity, is great. As Kazantzakis continually points out, however, quick-fix no-pain seekers need not apply to this God. The move to restitution of wholeness must proceed up the path which passes through the cross. There is no downplaying of the difficulties which the cross encompasses; nor is there any hope afforded for any means of circumventing the agonies. What is extended is the certainty of change, of ascent, of growth, of newness.

The new into which one is called may afford rewards of its own, but these cannot be foreseen or imagined by the one who is called to let go of what it has.³⁹

³⁸. Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, 9.

³⁹. Cobb, 56.

Kazantzakis' Saint Francis is a compendium of growth gained through an expanding relationship with God. True, the novel is restricted in that the personality with which it deals is historically aligned with this God. But one must also be cognizant of the relationship between the narrator, Brother Leo, and the author. While Saint Francis represents the Kazantzakian dutiful man, "the man who by means of ceaseless, supremely cruel struggle succeeds in fulfilling our highest obligations ... to transubstantiate the matter which God entrusted to us, and turn it into spirit",⁴⁰ it is the underlying current created by Brother Leo's growth which illuminates the personal struggle--and growth--of Nikos Kazantzakis.

Brother Leo is introduced as one who had "been going from monastery to monastery, from village to village, wilderness to wilderness, searching for God."⁴¹ With a change of time, costume, and arena, this could be Odysseus passing through the sieve of the Nile; or turning to the major character, somehow obscured in most readers' minds, it is a mirroring of Kazantzakis. As Brother Leo follows, sometimes parallels Saint Francis, he experiences the pains of an honest search, an honorable ascent. He disdains the Sunday souls, contemplating heaven and hell in the cathedral, but denying their existence

⁴⁰ N. Kazantzakis, Saint Francis, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 11.

⁴¹ Ibid., 13.

six other days. God calls each day, and growth comes only through a constant response. Watching Francis, Brother Leo also grows; and the careful reader recognizes that herein the author, too, is undergoing an intense growth as he ingests more and more of the historical Francis and his God.

Often a hand hovered before me in the air, a hand with an eternally renewed wound; someone seemed to have driven a nail through it, seemed to be driving a nail through it for all eternity.⁴²

Even as the novel ends, Brother Leo's growth in God enables him to perceive in a poor cold, wet and hungry sparrow the presence of Saint Francis--or rather the totality of Francis' message: the ascent is steep, the way is filled with agonies and struggles; but the fulness of the climb is the growth in God, the spirit becoming Spirit. Francis saw this; Brother Leo is portrayed as experiencing this; and Nikos Kazantzakis also partook of this. "God is the dark unknown all-probable explosive power, that breaks out even in the smallest particle of matter."⁴³

The Odyssey portrayed a similar discovery. From the seething warrior of Ithaca to the spiritual arrow racing upward into the firmament, Odysseus is but an earlier Brother Leo, another characterization of Kazantzakis. Savoring each spiritual "soup of the day", Odysseus recognizes the worth of each experience as an enhancing, growth-filled moment.

⁴². Ibid., 11.

⁴³. Kazantzakis, Journeying, 92.

Though often incomprehensible to man, Kazantzakis stipulates that an overriding plan makes use of each event to forward the progression of the created. Races disappear, villages disintegrate, even gods crumble--but a greater Source continues. The recognition of this aspect by various members of Odysseus's crew brings great satisfaction to him: They are not Sunday souls, for they have developed the ability to hear the call and to respond regardless of the hurting ascent.

To be free, to reach unity does not mean resting upon the laurels of one climb. Freedom comes through a continuing, sleepless struggle. The spirit's strife is present throughout our living; at death the Spirit's fulness becomes possible. While life flows within, challenges and growth go on, for God is involved in a future beyond our ken: "God can perhaps be comprehended anew ... as the creator of the still unplumbed depths of events."⁴⁴ Yet, in the challenge of these depths, in the demands of these uncharted events, lies the human's further growth.

⁴⁴. Pannenberg, 43.

Chapter 5

FINDING GOD IN UNLIKELY PLACES

A major function of the Church, and thereby a major commitment of the ministry, is to proclaim the faith. It is, therefore, mandatory that ministers ensure that they are aware of God's presence in the activities and places wherein the persons of his creation exist and function. For if my words merely point toward a God who resides in a mysterious realm far removed from mankind's awareness, a God abiding somewhere beyond the agonies and stench of human struggle, then I become a huckster of hope, a purveyor of but another sugared panacea which might lure some toward a misty possibility--but which is far more apt to cause a greater migration away from God, miring mankind deeper in an abyss of loneliness, lovelessness, and lethargy.

One has but to scan the Scripture to be aware of the intense emphasis upon a God who was present as his people wandered, struggled, endured--yes, even succeeded. The authors made a variety of individuals take on lasting and recognizable characteristics which cause them to be alive for us today. Moses, stutterer, sometimes rash in reactions, sometimes doubting his capabilities, yet one seeing newness lying beyond rocks and sands. Job seeking reason in the apparent inequalities of "rewards" in human endeavors; trying to gain perspective on the whys of belief, not by self-analysis or

peer group seminars, but by direct confrontation with God. Paul's rite of passage from adamant Jew into a foremost interpreter of Christ reveals the fulness of a real human working through disbelief and doubt into faith above agony and death. Jesus himself reflects many of the ingredients which we ourselves today descry as the agents of humanness. And there is help in seeing pieces of ourselves reflected in these portraits from the past.

But in the midst of each of these personality identifications, one is always aware that the authors have also provided ample insights into a God ever present, ever caring, ever creating, ever sharing, who also can be alive for us today. The God who coaxed Moses out of the lush Nile valley into the blazing heat of Sinai is the God who calls us from the comforts of our livingrooms into the challenge of a world shaken much like the old one "hoss" shay. The God who responded to Job's query is the God who also can enable us to arise from self-pity and enervating envy to a comprehension and praise of the endless wonders of the Creator. The God who so empowered Paul to see the light beyond the confining walls of his religious concepts is the God who can move us into a truly ecumenical Church. And the God who gave comfort, support and endless love to Jesus, even unto death, is the God who can lift us above the morass of temptations and denials, helping us to accept both our finitude and the unknown which stretches beyond death.

Thus, the scriptures do remain alive for us today. But, as Wesley was well aware, there are dangers in being a one-book person in a two-book parish--particularly if you, the parson, have not read the other book. And so Wesley read widely, seeking to give a critical Christian examination to as wide a field of human endeavors as possible. For this was the world in which his listeners lived; these were the events which they experienced; these were the agonies and ecstasies, the stench and sweet smells of success which they inhaled. Yet, in all, Wesley sought and confirmed the presence of the God who called Israel to come forth, who accompanied Jesus to the cross, who even today admonishes us to rise up and walk.

The reality of God is thoroughly underscored in the Scripture, and the layperson as well as the minister must be conversant with this presence. But to rely wholly on this one-book ministry is to deny personal growth, deny God's further creativity, deny heightened awareness in a congregation, and deny God's presence in the world which continued to be long after the final pages of the New Testament were canonized. If one is to meet the needs of a congregation, then every available resource must be tapped. We would hold suspect a lawyer who defended us solely on the Code of Hammurabi; and we would flee for our lives from a doctor who was committed to the lancet, blood cup and a slug of lead between the teeth. The reliable lawyer and doctor have been made historically aware of the beginnings of their fields of labor; but they have also been immersed in the on-going discoveries within

these fields. And the potentiality of legal recourse against them for false practice or misrepresentation usually is cause for their further study, research and reading. Even the individuals designing cars or children's nightwear are spotlighted under the demand that their progress must consider the safety and welfare of the user.

If, then, all these occupations which deal solely with the finite man are mandated to expand their core of knowledge, how can the minister, who must join together the finite and the infinite, stand before the congregation holding his "only book" and truly meet their needs? For that minister asserts that he is in the oasis of God and all else is wilderness.

But I assert that God is in every wilderness--and pastors who are truly shepherds had better track through as much of it as they can or their little spot of greenery will soon become the local version of the Sahel. In fact, why should not a populace which reacts radically against those occupations which "dilly" with their finite react even more radically against one which dallies with their infinite? Even as Moses, we are called to go up and take possession of these wildernesses--for God is in strange places.

Merrill Abbey, in reflecting upon this vast wilderness of words, wrote "a part of the minister's reading can help him diagnose the needs of his congregation. A body of useful literature has been produced as able writers, listen-

ing widely to all kinds of people, have reported what they heard."¹ How often in life we discover the solution to a personal puzzle in the report of someone else, for that person's experience affords us one additional key to the maze wherein we may be wandering. Stevenson puts it even more succinctly:

A third access to the counsel of God is extrabiblical reading and study. A man who studies only one book does not even understand that book. This is because God loves the whole world and works seven days a week, not merely on Sunday. The whole realm of culture and learning is his concern. A man who is sheltered from the yearning, the thoughts, and the hungers of the world is ill-equipped to serve a Master who loved publicans and sinners. In creative literature at its best--that is in biography, drama, short story, and novels--there "goes the crowded ways of life," and one hears "the cries of this rare clan." There he may not learn what God's action may be, but he will come closer to man's need.²

Nikos Kazantzakis has afforded the alert minister a valuable store of such creative literature. He had traveled widely in the crowded ways of life; he had listened carefully to all kinds of people; he reported accurately and with compassion what he had seen and heard; and in his works, one follows the thin red line of one who heard the cry. To merely scan Kazantzakis for "appropriate" sermon illustrations is to remain muzzled in the maze. But to read his works in depth, to follow his ideas and growth from level to level, to make the ascent with him--there is to see the possibilities beyond the wilderness, to go up and take possession. There one will

¹Merril R. Abbey, Communication in Pulpit and Parish, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 63.

Dwight E. Stevenson, The False Prophet (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), 89.

be far more closely in touch with man's needs. And if one's reading is fully attuned to the essential ingredients which serve as the leitmotif of Kazantzakis' works, then one may also discover some of what God's action may be.

To stand before a congregation and preach from Kazantzakis is not to imply that one indulge in the weekly book review. Newspapers and special magazines are usually far better equipped to provide the summation and critique of specific literary outpourings. In fact, some members of the congregation may be even more literarily astute than the preacher. A guide to better reading is not what the preacher is called forth to be.

To preach from Kazantzakis is to lift up the major themes of life as illuminated within the Scripture. It is to show how one man who, throughout his life, painfully searched for God made his way; to highlight the all-encompassing implications of that mission; to open a minute aperture into the awesome fulfillment that awaits the searcher's discovery. To preach from Kazantzakis is to open up ourselves; for the hopes, doubts, joys, defeats which he reveals in letters, poetry, novels, and reports are not only his, but also ours. Even more significantly, they are the issues which occur again and again throughout the Scriptures.

Thus, to preach from Kazantzakis is to give an added dimension to the Word. And it is the Word which the minister is mandated to preach; a Word only filtered through the speaker, a word highlighting a unity which extends from a

time in Egypt to Kazantzakis even unto today. As Bishop Kennedy wrote, "If God speaks through me, then the moments when I address my people are moments touched with timelessness."³ That is the strength of the Scripture; that is the essential ingredient of Kazantzakis; that is the undergirding hope for mankind. That which was, still is--and will continue to be.

What, then, are the ingredients of the Word which are emphasized in Kazantzakis' writings? As has been stated earlier in this project, the abyss and God are inextricably interrelated. But in this meshing, several other aspects of God's confrontation with man are delineated: the demands that God makes; the necessity of the Cross of Christ and the individual cross; life as commitment; the possibilities that are in God; the prophetic voice; and the human decisions that lead us forward into life or death. Time after time, Kazantzakis brilliantly pursues a literary parallel to these great issues which make up the essential, on-going tenor of the Scriptures.

God does make demands. The gift of life is not a no-strings-attached package. Too often humanity allows the gratuitous grace of God to become so cozily noxious that it deadens our ears and eyes to the Yahweh of the Old Testament and the Father about whom Jesus taught. Life as it is and

³. Gerald Kennedy, His Word through Preaching, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 12.

where we are often runs rampant over the agonized offering of Christ. We carefully sweep fine sand over the spots of blood at the foot of the cross. Gentle Jesus gives the strokes we really covet! And a God of mercy gathers our votes.

God is not elected to become our temporary leader. We do not select him out to be the guru of the hour, the fixer of our momentary lapses. We become enamoured of the servant motif, but turn the image topsy-turvey and elevate the created to the served. We languish on our couches, take our leisure in the pew--and call upon God to descend. But God makes the demands; and we are called upon to make the ascent. Moses climbed Sinai; Jesus mounted the cross; and I, too, must ascend if I am to answer God's call.

Kazantzakis was absorbed in this aspect of God, and made it a central element which runs throughout his writings. No matter what plateau he reached in his personal life, he continued to press onward in his ascent.

...how many times I slipped and fell as I clambered on all fours up God's rough, unaccommodating ascent, how many times I rose, covered with blood, and began once more to ascend.⁴

There are no permanent resting places. Temptations abound which call out to us, "Stay, the journey is ended. Take your pleasure here." Positions, possessions, persons permeate our little world. We are pulled to permanency where we are. But

⁴Nikos Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 12.

it is a false facade which can separate us not only from one another, but even more fearfully, terminate our relation with God.

There can be no proper horizontal relationship between man and man until it is motivated by a higher, perpendicular relationship between God and man.⁵

It is so in human lives. When we forge ahead, relying on our intuitions, our technical proficiencies, our magnetic personalities, life conceals the fulness of its contents. We miss the singing of the earth as well as the call of God. In Kazantzakis' Saint Francis, the Saint points this out to Brother Leo. Wishing to hear the music of the lute, he discovers that even within a barren stick there is beauty.

"Do you hear, Brother Leo? Do you hear? Cast aside your mind and leave your heart free to listen. When a person believes in God there is no such thing as a mute piece of wood, or pain unaccompanied by exultation, or ordinary everyday life without miracles."⁶

Are these not the demands of God? And the fulfillments which are realized when we respond to the call? Take time to smell the flowers is not the slogan of the local florist; it is the statement of him who created our surroundings. In the flower, in the barren wooden limb is God; beyond the pain of the ascent is exultation; and our everyday existence

⁵James H. Robinson, Adventurous Preaching, (Great Neck; Channel Press, 1956), 176.

⁶N. Kazantzakis, Saint Francis, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 351.

can be filled with miracles. When we meet the demands of God, newness becomes reality. This is what Columbus, when chided by the unbelieving Abbot and Captain Alonso, responded.

All of you have clutched the robes of Fate and hang there for dear life -- the faithless have no other god! But I am hanging from the hands of Christ. My mind is a chart, mapped by God; and everything on it is marked, without a single error: the unknown shores, the winds, the currents, the days and nights, the miles... and a red line slashes across the ocean, charting the route of the prow of my ship. If I do not find the shores that rose in my heart eight years ago, I will cry out to God and report that it is not there, and He will dip His hand into the waves and bring it forth.⁷

Is not this the message Jeremiah stated again and again to his people? Isn't this the response Job received from God? And is this not the brilliance beyond the cross to which Jesus proceeded? God does demand! But in meeting the demand, in answering the call is life. All else is truly shifting sand.

The Easter story is repeated yearly from the pulpit and in the classroom. We revel in the good news "Christ is risen", whether or not we comprehend its content and intent. This event is perceived as a great new beginning; but in seeing it only as a thrust into the future, we overload the significance of the cross as also an end. An end necessary for the attainment of God's ultimate will; an end necessary for us to experience again and again; an end necessary for the exultation of Jesus of Nazareth.

⁷N. Kazantzakis, Three Plays, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 28.

Things come too easily to many of us. The newspaper appears on the lawn in the early morning hours. Water and electricity come at the twist of a finger. The events of deepest Africa occur in our living rooms as they happen. And we are likewise impressed by instantaneous personalities. One-shot performances fill headlines and bolster emulation. Glory in a moment is what we too often seek. But that is not life. That is not the glory. And that is not the cross which was an end. Life, glory and the cross are the long haul, the slugging away daily to progress, the hanging-on when quitting seems so reasonable.

We are much more impressed with sudden brilliance or isolated acts of genius. But finally most things come down to fighting the fight, finishing the race, and keeping the faith. The Bible puts a very high estimate on people who do not quit.⁸

This is an essential ingredient of our faith which should be emphasized again and again, for if there were one sin which would ultimately sever our connection to our God it is giving up. We rely heavily upon God continuing the good fight, being present when we call. But we ignore too readily the mandate that we press on. One-sided allegiances are illusions, miasmas marking tragedy. Short-termed allegiances are counter-productive, undermining the long-range hopes. The minister must lift up the necessity of the long haul.

⁸. Gerald Kennedy, Fresh Every Morning, (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 167.

The preacher in every time of crisis and conflict must point people to religion's primary objective -- an allegiance which is always above and beyond the present, and which challenges, judges, and redeems all human institutions and situations.⁹

The cross was not a momentary burst of brilliance or tragedy. It did not appear on the scene in the frantic scramblings of an evening. It was the culmination of Jesus' continued efforts to call mankind away from the illusions of get and grab. Failure and frustration abounded, but one foot carefully followed another as he proceeded toward his goal. The story of Moses is a similar illustration of the labors of the long pull and the illusions of temporary talismen.

The writings of Kazantzakis abound with this attribute. If the cross of Jesus was to have relevance, then the cross of each individual must not be of momentary magnitude. The meaning of the cross is only realized when it is dealt with over the span of one's living. If the end and beginning afforded by Golgotha are to be comforters for the living of one's days, then the individual cross must also be an ever-present blanket as one makes the ascent.

The moments when man surges toward his salvation seem to me the most sublime ones in the whole human journey. The greater the difficulty a mortal has in liberating himself, the more we derive courage from his example and find consolation in his victory.¹⁰

An ascent without difficulty is no ascent at all, for one would never be aware of the climb. We ride elevators to

⁹Robinson, 166 and 167.

¹⁰Helene Kazantzakis, Nikos Kazantzakis, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 520.

save time, to conserve our energy for "greater deeds". We delight in the odd streets of San Francisco, but ensure that our town is "on the level." We take an escalator up one level to speed up our buying time, for the climb might dissuade us from the purchase. The ease of arriving, getting, conquering is what we desire. Give me the good old plastic cross! Yet how illusive those conquests become when the days dwindle down--and how I must despair at the things begun but never finished. One may pause in the ascent, shift the load to gain balance; but one cannot discard the cross. We may be torn between the two; we may earnestly desire to drop the cross and cry, "I have arrived"; we may envision multitudes of values in the easy way, decrying the necessity of additional steps. But the choice is clear.

I could clearly feel two great torrents struggling within me: the one pushes toward harmony, patience and gentleness. It functions with ease, without effort, following only the natural order of things. You throw a stone up high and for a second you force it against its will; but quickly it joyfully falls again. You toss a thought in the air but the thought quickly tires, it becomes impatient in the empty air and falls back to earth and settles with the soil. An unbelievable absurdity. It wants to conquer weight, abolish sleep, and, with the last, prod the Universe upward.¹¹

How comforting the easy way seems. Just a minute effort, and riches, retinues, and regalia become mine. Then I can relax, relishing this moment forever. But how empty

¹¹. N. Kazantzakis, Journeying, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 186.

it becomes when measured against eternity. For riches return to earth, retinues settle into the soil, and regalia perishes when the trumpets cease to sound. These are not the things which conquer weight, abolish sleep, nor prod the Universe upward. Time and history are littered with the shabby remnants of such vainglorious ventures. Persons, places and principalities are the dust over which the cross-bearers pass as upward they ascend. Ozimandias, Babylon, the Third Reich, the Nixon years. Baubles do not a kingdom make.

Nor is the kingdom realized by a solo journey. We are called to struggle upward, to carry our burden. But we must be ever aware that the burdens of our fellow climbers must be shouldered when they grow weary, suffer set-backs, or are tempted to desist.

"All the souls in the world," priest(Fotis) took him up, "are hung round the neck of each man. So don't make the distinction between 'yours' and 'mine', Father."¹²

Thus did the spiritual leader of the struggling band of dispossessed respond to the glutton, drunkard, lecher priest Grigoris. One had lived all their misfortunes, yet still shouldered their burdens. The other ruminated how best he might rid his town of the famished band. One ascended, one sunk into the mire. For one, the string of souls became buoys enhancing the climb. For the other, they were stones which hastened the judgment.

¹²•N. Kazantzakis, The Greek Passion, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), 41.

We are our brothers' keepers! Will we make the climb or subside into the dust? Will we one day come into the presence or fail to pierce the abyss?

All my life, however, I was sure of one thing: That one road, and one road only, leads to God -- the ascent. Never the descent or the level road, only the ascent.¹³

If we cease to climb, apathy and atrophy become our basic constituents. The mind and body weaken, the goal vanishes, the call goes unanswered. But when we respond; when we renew our efforts; when we seek for fingerholds; when we lift up our cross and move onward, there is a power greater and purer than our own which enhances the ascent. The ascent may be fearsome, but we are infused with the necessities to endure.

By picking up one's cross, by undertaking to fulfill one's responsibility to mankind and to the Creator, an individual becomes obligated to carry through. For a life which has content, which has purpose, is a life of commitment. And a committed life encompasses all the ingredients required to wholly transform one's own existence as well as the world within which one is located. A fascinating collage of worldly Lorelei will always entice us, will seek to enervate our higher ideals. But the truth will always be that, until we are committed, "until we have found something to serve unselfishly, we have not found the clue to life."¹⁴

¹³•N. Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, 465.

¹⁴•Kennedy, Fresh Every Morning, 66.

Mankind seeks the simple solutions. They promise us the greatest returns for the least effort; and effortless achievements are appealing. We indulge in fast foods, quicky marriages, and overnight personality enrichments. We search out instant wealth and winning tennis in paperback books. We teach winning sports by subtle illegalities. We sell instant degrees and pedigrees. But these, drawing forth our vilest selfishness, conceal rather than reveal life's clue. Failing to discover the elixirs of the instantaneous, we flit from novelty to novelty, dissatisfied, dissipated and destroyed. By circumscribing myself with momentary magic, I remain uncommitted. Yet life is commitment!

In the prologue of Last Temptation, Kazantzakis wrote, "A weak soul does not have the endurance to resist the flesh for very long. It grows heavy, becomes flesh itself, and the contest ends. But among responsible men, men who keep their eyes riveted day and night upon the Supreme Duty, the conflict between flesh and spirit breaks out mercilessly and may last until death."¹⁵ Round the clock responsibility to the Supreme Duty! That is commitment!

Kazantzakis' painstaking gift of love to Christ and mankind, The Last Temptation of Christ, exemplifies total commitment. While the Orthodox Church was initially scan-

¹⁵. N. Kazantzakis, The Last Temptation of Christ, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 2.

dalized by the image of a Jesus who appeared less than perfect, Kazantzakis portrayed a Jesus whose humanity became real. Jesus was surrounded by temptations, lures which were similar to those by which we are yet beset. Security of job, permanency of family, pillar of the local church, community spokesman, leader of a specialized sect. All could be self-aggrandizing, self-fulfilling, self-isolating. They were obligations to self only, responsible to no one else. But Jesus was committed. From the early pages wherein he tells Judas "do not step in my way" until he dies on the cross, shaking off illusions of joys, marriages and children, Jesus was bound to the accomplishment of the task for which he knew God had called him. God held the clue of life. And life is commitment.

It is this same commitment, this same clutching of life's clue that is portrayed in Saint Francis. In the initial encounter between Brother Leo and the young noble, the exchange goes:

"I lack nothing! I don't want to be pitied, I want to be envied. ... I lack nothing, I tell you!"

"Nothing?" I asked. "Not even heaven?"

He lowered his head and was silent. But after a moment: "Heaven is too high for me. The earth is good, exceptionally good--and near me!"¹⁶

How familiar that sounds. How interwoven in my own life that statement lies. For heaven is separate from the

¹⁶. N. Kazantzakis, Saint Francis, 19.

secular circle within which we whirl. And for many, the earth is exceptionally good--and particularly near. I look around at the things within my walls, and I lack nothing. Nothing? Only everything unless I am enjoined to strive for the Kingdom--for therein is the clue to the real life. In reaching for the key, in making the commitment to true life, man will always be asked to surpass the strength allotted to man. But this is precisely what God expects from us. For the easy things lie within our capabilities, but the Kingdom, the ascent--these require the added power, the extra courage, the grace which are given through God.

As Francis lies dying, all about him began to wail and lament. "Why are you weeping, my brothers?" asked Francis, surprised. No one replied.

"Do you really believe this life to be so sweet? Where is your faith in the life everlasting, my brothers? Is it so very slight? Brother Death, you who are standing just beyond the door; forgive mankind. Men do not know your lofty message, and that is why they fear you."¹⁷

That is the clue to life, the kingdom to which life can lead. And that is commitment to life.

This is a major element of The Fratricides, Kazantzakis' novel concerning the Greek civil war. The blacks and reds, each claiming sole possession of the key to Greece's internal problems, turned to murder and pillage--and brother sought out brother, dealing death with as much joy as they found around the family hearth. But Father Yanaros stood in

¹⁷.Ibid., 377.

the center, called equally well by both opposing elements, Bulgar, traitor, bolshevist, tramp, fascist, scoundrel. Some people donned red hoods and went to the mountains; some wore black and barricaded themselves in the village. But Yanaros stood in the center shouting, Unite-- for that is where Christ had come to at the cross. That is where Christ would have stood in the novel, where Christ would stand to-day. And that is where we must stand.

"Thank You, Lord," he would murmur. "Thank you for choosing me for this dangerous task. I can endure it, even though I am not loved here. Only don't pull the rope too tightly, Lord. I am a man, not an ox or an angel. I'm only human; how much more can I endure? One of these days I might snap. Forgive me for telling You this, Lord, but at times You seem to forget it, and You ask more of man than of Your angels."¹⁸

Yanaros does not snap. His statement to God, however, does reflect the position at which each of us must arrive again and again, giving thanks for being chosen to be in the hard spot, but uncertain of how much tension on the tether we can accept. We are only humans, and God does ask much of us. But God possesses that greater power which enables us to hold on. If we dig in; if we turn away from the allurements of easy getting; if we seek to be emptied and not envied, then we can endure. Agony or ecstasy, life is commitment. And commitment leads to a new life.

¹⁸. N. Kazantzakis, The Fratricides, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 9.

As Nikos Kazantzakis wrote to Elena, "We have been well tried in sorrows and in joys and have emerged victorious from the trial. May God keep our hearts thus, always upright, pure, invincible..."¹⁹

¹⁹. H. Kazantzakis, 291.

Chapter 6

MARK 14:32-42

Exegesis

An initial reading of the Gethsemane pericope conveys a picture of Jesus and his disciples going to a place, which they apparently visited while in Jerusalem, and therein Jesus seeks partial solitude and prays. In view of other Gospel occurrences which identify prayer periods for Jesus, and the highlighting of the special relationship which is depicted as existing between God and Jesus (which seems to impute the necessity for a particular mode of communication, a mode specifically particularized as prayer), the event, as a time of prayerful and physical/internal struggle, is probably an actual occurrence. "There is no reason to question the historicity of Jesus' struggle in prayer in Gethsemane."¹

While the occurrence of prayer, particularly as a positive undertaking during a period of intense, personal stress, is valid, the intent and placement of the pericope in the Gospel according to Mark implies far more than another meditative mood for Jesus. The variety of happenings encompassed in this particular segment raises several issues which need to be addressed. If this grouping is a Markan working,

¹•Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Mark, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1970), 310.

what was the original story? What additions may have been made prior to this literary finalizing? What are the Markan embellishments? What was the purpose of the pericope? And does it belong at this particular juncture in the gospel? For if, as Taylor writes, "Both in the descriptive element and in the words of Jesus, we receive the impression of standing very close to the original facts, by implications which carry us far beyond the record itself,"² then we must deal carefully with both the facts and the implications.

Eta Linnemann's analysis of this pericope had indicated that a single narrative may have been developed through several stages of redaction.³

1) The original story:

- 32 And they went to a place which was called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I pray."
- 35 And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.
- 37 And he came and found them sleeping.
- 39 And again he went away and prayed.
- 40ab And he came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?"
- 40c And they did not know what to answer him.
- 41c (And he said) "It is enough; the hour has come."

²•Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to Mark (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1952), 551.

³•Eta Linnemann, "Passion and Resurrection Narratives, Gethsemane", handout for a course in the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel tradition, School of Theology, Spring 1977.

2) First level additions:

- 33 And he took with him Peter and James and John,
and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.
- 34ab And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful,
even to death;"
- 36 And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are pos-
sible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not
what I will, but what thou wilt."

3) Second level additions:

- 34c "...remain here and watch."
- 38 "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temp-
tation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the
flesh is weak."

4) Markan additions:

- 37bc And he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep?
Could you not watch one hour?"
- 41d "Behold, the Son of Man is handed over into the
hands of sinners.
- 42 Rise. Let us go. Behold, the one handing me over
approaches."

However, while providing a comprehensible time frame of expansion, Linnemann's analysis extends the parameters of the original story too far and includes in earlier additions segments which seem much more closely aligned with the Markan concepts.

I propose the basic block to have been like this:

- 32 And they went to a place which was called Geth-
semane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here,
while I pray."
- 33b And began to be greatly distressed and troubled.
- 35 And going a little farther, he fell on the ground
and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour
might pass from him.

37 And he came and found them sleeping.

41c (And he said) "It is enough; the hour has come."

The early recollection, particularly if one is searching for the "what might have been of witnesses or the earliest needs of the church" would surely not have emphasized the contrast of prayer and sleeping, as Linnemann's conceptualizing delineates; but rather would have lifted up distress and trouble, and the movement to prayer. For if the early church was in travail and sought stories of remembrance whereby courage and faith might be enhanced, "sleeping" becomes highly suspect as a component of the earliest tradition. I do not wish to denigrate the theological capabilities of the shapers of the earliest oral tradition; but the sleeping insertion seems to imply a carefully aligned construct whose worth is far more relevant to a later time wherein an inner church interpretation or theology was developing. Thus, I disagree with Dibelius's statement that, "we disregard first of all the possibility that there may have existed prior to Mark a story of the suffering of Jesus and start from Mark as the oldest account we know."⁴ If the Messianic seeking was prevalent in the Old Testament, and this message was given airing in the pre-Jesus communal worship, then the linkage surely took place prior to the Markan writings. I believe Taylor's analysis is far more likely:

⁴ Martin Dibelius, "Gethsemane", Crozer Quarterly XII, (1935), 254.

"The phrase καὶ ἤρξατο ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι καὶ ἰδὲν μοῦναι is one of the most important statements in Mark;...the boldness of the phrase is its guarantee."⁵

And the guarantee is not that of its Markan inclusion; rather, it reflects an assurance of Jesus' total involvement in the madness of that moment in Gethsemane, and the intense remembrance of and meaning for the early church. Without the inclusion of verse 33b, the basic elements are flat, unfeeling, and uninspiring. NO, if the suffering of the cross, well known to the early church, had meaning, then the suffering had also to be evident in the moments of Gethsemane. To move unfeelingly through prayer, donning pain and agony only upon the erected cross, plays far too loosely with both the church tradition and prayer, as Jesus offered it. Temple also sees it in this light, writing "Behind Mark-B and the John-source there was a common floating tradition concerning the 'troubling of Jesus' and concerning 'the cup'."⁶

I would then see first and second level additions as being:

34abc And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch.

36 And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt."

⁵.Taylor, 552.

⁶.S. Temple, "The Two Traditions of the Last Supper, Betrayal and Arrest," New Testament Studies, VII, (1961), 84.

- 38 "watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

It would appear, in these additions, that verse 28 might have followed verse 34c wherein the watching was linked to the praying of the disciples; and preceded the only sleeping segment which my proposed traditional view includes. It would then outline Jesus placing the disciples, not as guards watching, but as those to whom, having been instructed in all else, Jesus now exemplifies the deepest level of prayer. He was to be watched; and they were to pray for and with him, and for themselves. "Jesus prays as the Christian is to pray."⁷ Yet even in his instruction, Jesus was aware of their humanness--and that they were tired, and that the actual hour was late. So, in the melding of tradition and the early additions, there is no condemnation of the disciples; nor is "sleeping" an issue. The central focus remains Jesus' sorrow and prayer, highlighting the horrible cost of the ensuing cross, and emphasizing the terrible price that Jesus was already beginning to pay in order to gain victory over sin and death.

"The Gethsemane scene is the deepest expression of the Messianic suffering which is accomplished for the salvation of the world."⁸

⁷ Dibelius, 260.

⁸ T. Alec Burkill, "St. Mark's Philosophy of the Passion," Novum Testamentum, II (1958), 265.

Jesus was on the brink of the abyss. The work in which he had engaged as God's Select was leading to death, assuredly not in any way which Jesus might have earlier envisioned. And to peer into that abyss might have raised images of Sheol, that place wherein man was wholly separated from God. "To be fully conscious of the nearness of God and yet to be excluded from him is what the ancient dogmas saw as the tortures of hell."⁹ The early church had to be aware of this critical point in Jesus' life; and must have seen it not only as focusing on Jesus' suffering, but as also zeroing in on their own personal crises during a time of severe trial.

On the one hand, "Jesus is portrayed here as one whose suffering is real.....a brother to the man who is plunged into the deepest distress."¹⁰ Like unto man, yet of God in a fulness beyond man's comprehension. Jesus, he who agonizes in prayer, is not a trembling human worried about drought, pestilence or exile. The future of creation rested upon and within him: "Thus Jesus' struggle in prayer was not something which was to be concealed or was to be grudgingly admitted; it was no disgrace, but proof of his Messiahship."¹¹

As a result of the foregoing placements, the Markan additions would then include:

33a And he took with him Peter and James and John

⁹Wolfhart Pannenberg, The Apostles' Creed (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 91.

¹⁰Schweizer, 311.

¹¹Dibelius, 257.

- 37bc And he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep?
Could you not watch one hour?"
- 39 And again he went away and prayed.
- 40abc And again he came and found them sleeping, for
their eyes were very heavy. And they did not
know what to answer him.
- 41abd And he came the third time, and said to them,
"Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?"
"Behold, the Son of Man is handed over into the
hands of sinners.
- 42 Rise, let us go. Behold the one handing me over
approaches."

My primary reason for assigning ownership of verses 33a, 40ab and 41ab to the Markan authorship is the particularly methodological and neat workmanship involved in the complex and expanding use of triads. It is far too perfect to be either accidental or a grafting onto prior traditions. Rather, the author has derived a continuing web of incidents which build and rebuild on the number three.

Jesus is portrayed as going to Gethsemane with the disciples. Then he tells them to sit, while he removes himself a little. After which, he takes 3 of the disciples, and then separates from them. Here are three stages of removal from the community: the 12, the 3, then Jesus alone. Additionally, a possible triad concerning "handing over" is involved: Jesus handing over the 12 (and the church) to the rigors ahead for them; handing over possible leadership or direction to the three; and the handing over of Jesus to the world, the will of God. Following so closely after the threefold prediction, and preceding the threefold denial sequences, the

selection of this methodology had to be designed.

Schweizer states that "Jesus returns three times although he goes away only twice."¹² In this determination, Schweizer errs for he has obviously begun his mathematics with Jesus' coming in verse 37. What he has overlooked is that after the 'monologue' with Peter, James and John, Jesus (vs 35) went a little farther, then prayed. He had already gone away from them, for how else could he return to them. This going and returning triad is also a carefully contrived literary device, which further fits in with the other triads, a definite Markan trait.

Conferring the ownership of vs 33a upon Mark implies that 37bc must also belong to Mark, both for the designed double usage of Peter, and the possible anti-Peter feelings herein exposed. However, in view of what I shall say later concerning the intent of the passage, the contention of a Markan anti-Peter axis based solely on this pericope cannot be supported.

Having worked through a three layered development of this pericope, the major queries, its purpose and its placement, still remain to be answered. The key to these questions has to be sought in the specific words or phrases which laid out this story. 'Cup' and 'hour' have previously appeared

¹². Schweizer, 310.

in their full context within the Markan intent; therefore, their usage here, while reaffirming the original meaning, does not pierce into the pericope. Since the disciples have been portrayed as careful watchers (though not critical interpreters) of Jesus, 'watching', too, is not the opening to this text. And as I have already stated, 'sleeping' is not the critical issue--though it may be contributive to a secondary element of the pericope.

The crucial issue involved in this segment is contained in the phrases ἤρξατο ἐχθαμβεῖσθαι καὶ ἀδυναθεῖν and περίλυπός ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἕως θανάτου (vs 34)¹³

An uncritical scanning of the pericope might seem to lead to a view of a weakening Jesus turning to God for release; a doubting Messianic pretender seeking to escape the validating seal necessary to affirm his claim. But it is this haste which would becloud the issue; which would find the kernel in Jesus-Peter polarities, as in the issue of sleeping.

The terms break down initially into statements of internalized struggle; they indicate being in anxiety, being distressed, being troubled, being very unhappy. But even on this level, the entirety of their content is missing. A comparison of various interpretations reveals the problem:

RSV: "...and began to be greatly distressed and troubled."

Wesley: "...and he began to be sore amazed, and in deep anguish."

¹³•NOVUM TESTAMENTUM GRAECE (London: United Bible Society, 1975), 129.

JK:"...and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy."

NEB:" Horror and dismay came over him...."

GN for MM:" Distress and anguish came over him...."

Living Bible:" My soul is crushed by sorrow to the point of death."

Berkely:" My soul is mortally grieved..."

The authors and editors have struggled to reach the depth of those phrases; and that is the basic issue in which Jesus was involved, and which Mark lifts up in his interwoven redaction and composition. Anxiety, distressed, troubled, unhappy do not pierce the veneer which our everyday use of the terms has formed. The addition of modifying adverbs barely helps. Jesus peered into the abyss, an abyss wherein death awaited. And the surety of that death wracked his entire being.

This agony is evidenced by the depth which the various interpreters have searched out: deep anguish, heavy, horror, deepest, deeply, sorrowful unto death, break with grief, almost crushes, soul is crushed, mortally grieved. The agony through which Jesus was required to go is barely discernible in the original and describable in translation, "He was surrounded by sorrow on every side, breaking in upon Him with such violence as was ready to separate His soul from His body."¹⁴

¹⁴. John Wesley, Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament (London: Charles H. Kelly, n.d.), 188.

What he undertook has not been repeated by any other. And, as is further evidenced by lack of reference to any discernible response from God, which certainly would have been inserted if that were of importance, Jesus was required to face the issue alone; and to come to terms with it as he defined himself.

"The narrator accordingly has considered it very important to depict the agony of Jesus as it finds expression in lament and prayer. What he has not depicted is a strengthening and comforting of Jesus."¹⁵

Jesus had to sort out this dilemma in view of all his prior activities and the future to which he pointed. There could be no meeting of the board; in fact, the disciples are depicted as not fully comprehending the prior issues, let alone now being capable of offering advice. And while Jesus prays to God, the decision had to come from the freedom which God gives to all humanity. There could be no external source selecting the way--not if this action was to serve as a fundamental foundation for his followers: it required "an inner communion leading to outer communication."¹⁶ For Jesus, "the God that is to come" is the all-determining reality. "In the floodlight of this God's future he saw his own present."¹⁷

¹⁵•Dibelius, 254 and 255.

¹⁶•Lynn Harold Hough, The Man of Power (New York: Abingdon Press, 1916), 74.

¹⁷•Pannenberg, 17.

In the portion of the Second Gospel preceding Gethsemane, Jesus is always characterized as one in control, demonstrating a wide variety of capabilities, and encompassing those traits associated with one of evident internal strength and potential power. "Follow me and I will make...;" "he taught them as one who had authority...;" "Be silent and come out of him!" There are no queries as to the wishes of those he is depicted as choosing to be his followers; nor is 'if' presented. Do and it will happen! The teaching episode does not depict one who is feeling his way into a ministry, but rather one who has its fullness within his grasp. Even the episode with the unclean spirit is framed to highlight Jesus' extraordinary being.

The Markan author concentrates on action verbs in an active tense whenever Jesus undertakes a ministerial function. "Be clean, go, show yourself, Rise...;" Jesus goes, tells, does; he is in control and evidences no weaknesses while all others about him reflect anxiety, doubts and uncertainty. Even the elements are directed, rather than cajoled: "Peace! Be Still!"

The healing events further emphasize this inner strength of Jesus; for it is the healed's faith in Jesus which culminates the healing rather than the act itself. The doubters are depicted as seeking continual external evidences (i.e. new signs or miracles) upon which to base their determinations; but the vision of those who truly see pierces

beyond the events: "your faith has made you well."

When Jesus talks with those who would detract from his capabilities and thereby deny the truth, he is again always in control. The scenes do not lay out a give and take discussion; rather Jesus zeroes in immediately on their falseness, exemplifying them as wholly out of touch with that which Jesus contains; the Son of man is lord not only of man, but of the sabbath, and all creation. And as they took offense with him, their anger is evident. Yet, except for the temple scene, Jesus' response is always that of one fully in control.

Following Gethsemane, Jesus is again in control. He does not run away from Gethsemane. He goes with his captors as one with dignity and meaning. During the trial, he does not respond to the legalistic and ritualistic questions, but silently demonstrates that it is he who holds court--and that it is the accusers who are being judged. Even on the cross, that last abyss, the story submerges any feeling of pain or image of the conquered. The cry of agony is directed not toward the world, which would indicate its victory, but to God; for Jesus' "responsibility is Godward, God himself being both agent and victim yet demanding of Christ's manhood total assent to total surrender."¹⁸

¹⁸. Kay Baxter "Being and Faith in the Theater," in Nathan A. Scott (ed.) The Broken Center (New York: Seabury Press, 1966), 102-127, 105.

The strength, the courage of Jesus in the last 2½ chapters of the Markan gospel are not the same as that outlined in the portion preceding Gethsemane. But it does follow directly the pattern established in the lament and prayer which Jesus issued up as he peered into the gaping chasm leading to death. And that is the issue which the Gethsemane pericope holds forth: the courage and strength of Jesus are altered, and must now be seen in a new perspective, a perspective which points in a more comprehensible direction for those who followed. Gethsemane serves as a centrifuge, spinning off the unessential, separating out the primal matter: "In the act of courage the most essential part of our being prevails against the less essential."¹⁹

In the Gethsemane pericope, Jesus made the ultimate decision to live wholly out of the hand of God. And it was Jesus' decision, made through an awareness of the special qualities/relationship which he perceived in himself. It was Jesus' will inextricably interwoven with those standards which he preached as issuing from God's ultimate demands. Will and standards, one unity: or as Tillich wrote, "Freedom and subjection to valid norms are one and the same thing."²⁰

Having taken a non-changing stand throughout the ministry of the Markan story, there was no alternative option

¹⁹ Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 5.

²⁰ Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), III, 28.

available when Jesus prayed. Any other choice would have been meaningless to the issue which he had continuously addressed. While the choice was his, it was mandated that he turn to God for the inner filling which could alleviate his anxiety and distress.

"He who is in the grip of doubt and meaninglessness cannot liberate himself from this grip; but he asks for an answer which is valid within and not outside the situation of despair."²¹

Thus, the interplay between Jesus and the three disciples is not to ridicule the weakness nor misunderstanding of the followers. Rather, it is to lift up the alteration in strength and courage which will be necessary to give validity to an understanding of the cross; and to give positive direction to the followers who might perceive themselves grappling with the reality of living from a position of weakness, caste adrift by a non-caring God. For God was still present--and Gethsemane was "the radical way in which Jesus objectifies the fact that God is for man and with man."²²

The abyss gapes, dark, foreboding, potentially unbearable. And Jesus, distressed, troubled, sorrowful unto death, turns to God in prayer--a God whom he might have felt had

²¹.Tillich, The Courage To Be, 175.

²².Schweizer, 315.

deserted his faithful servant. But he discovered God still there, and thereby went from Gethsemane to the cross filled with a new strength, a heightened courage--a courage "rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt."²³ It is Jesus' newly gained strength which provides the incentive for a new belief to go on, pressing into its abysses, discovering God always present.

"One soul's full acceptance of suffering may free another from doom and release atoning power."²⁴

Without Gethsemane, all that follows lacks perspective, reflects an uncomprehensible Jesus, and lacks the necessary element to generate freeing, atoning power.

²³. Tillich, The Courage To Be, 190.

²⁴. Baxter, 105.

Sermon: "A RITE OF PASSAGE"

In his novel The Last Temptation of Christ, the Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis depicts Jesus' life during the time of his ministry, leading from a carpenter's shop to an outstretched form nailed to the product of another artisan in wood. Closely following the gospel story, yet interweaving intriguing threads drawn from his highly creative mind, Kazantzakis lifts up the human traits which Jesus might have encompassed; human traits that are drawn from such as you and me.

The most fascinating aspect of this novel, the one which has enabled me to visualize vividly the hidden Jesus of the Canon, is the development of Jesus' submerged thoughts concerning a life similar to others. For Kazantzakis carefully constructs his novel around an underlying concept in which Jesus, ever faithful to his God-given mission, sometimes sees himself married, a father, and occupied in an ordinary occupation. Jesus says, "I've finished wrestling with God, we have become friends. I won't build crosses any more. I'll build troughs, cradles, bedsteads." And this is the last temptation, the human hope which Jesus grasps as he hangs upon the cross peering into the abyss; as the pain pierces each nerve ending, as his brain races to grasp this event in all its agony and apparent abandonment, his mind raises a scene wherein he, Martha, Mary, and the children are enjoying the pleasures of their home. With this comforting image, Jesus begins to drift into unconsciousness.

But such a thought is a placebo, a temporary trinket which denies life's actualities. It is a trap in which, once one is ensnared, the separation from meaning and God becomes final. It is the gossamer covering before the abyss which yawns deep and foreboding. The Oxford Universal Dictionary describes an abyss as "any deep immeasurable space or cavity, the deep, bottomless." Thus, an abyss appears to be something which must be avoided at all costs. The abyss is that horror of dreams; it is that hole from which parents continually warn their children to stay away. Abysses may be looked at but never entered.

Life is constantly filled with such abysses. Every day each one of us encounters them. Oh, certainly they do not always gape as forbidding, immeasurable, bottomless. But they exist--and we do try to avoid them.

When I first had command of a ship, after two years in an academic office, I encountered such a moment: a new captain, an untrained crew, and a new demand. We were operating with a large aircraft carrier which was conducting night carrier qualifications. Late at night, one of my crewmen suffered either a heart attack or an intense electrical shock. The hospital corpsman carried out all examinations in which he was qualified, but the patient failed to respond. The nearest doctors were on the carrier--or at a shore base nearly four hours steaming time away. The choices were minimal--and considering the crewman's life, only one

was correct: transfer the doctor from the carrier to the destroyer via highline.

A new captain, an untrained crew, and an evolution which necessitates bringing two huge steel ships to within fifty feet of each other while underway, and transferring a person in a chair attached to a rope and pulleys, hanging over the sea-filled gap between the hulls. All this in a pitch black night. How I thought about that office chair; or daylight when a helicopter transfer might be managed. But it was night, I was in command, and a man's life was in jeopardy.

Even this borders on a greater abyss. And I've said not all are so large. Perhaps it's tax time, and a child requires sudden medical treatment. Where does the money go? or come from? A new job is offered. But it necessitates moving and changing schools. Or an older person can no longer take care of home and self, yet dreads the nursing home or retirement center. Even someone offering box seats to a ball game for a Sunday morning when you have a Sunday school class to teach. These are the abysses which thrust themselves into our lives; the pits which we would gladly ignore--or wish to disappear. But they are there, and we cannot avoid them.

Remember Sunshine, the television program about the young mother who had cancer? Death was inevitable, but it could be postponed if she would undergo surgery and lose her leg. A mother without legs of a young, active, growing

child? Or the case of Joe Roth, the University of California quarterback, whose body was for four years slowly eaten away by cancer; and who also was given the option of amputating both legs in order to derive a minimal extended living. But these, too, are the larger abysses. What about the maximally handicapped young person attending high school on a campus designed for, and filled with the fully mobile, vocal, and unhampered? Or the five year old child, who has been consistently assured that it's good to share thoughts and activities with the parents, and has now committed, to him, some tragic action. These also are the abysses which appear in human paths, blockages we would gladly walk widely around. But they exist--and they are part of us.

Job teetered on the edge of the abyss. In his story all he had was taken: wife, children, servants and possessions. Job, the blameless and upright one, stripped naked to the eyes of the world. And he cries, "Why is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul?" And later, "Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?" His way out dangled before him: he had but to curse God and die, and the earthly suffering would be ended.

Consider Jeremiah: known by God before his birth, consecrated and appointed a prophet to his people. Yet when he spoke the words of the Lord, the people mocked him; even his own family, their egos and status slurred by this son's

positions and statements, participated in a plot to destroy Jeremiah. And their comforts, possessions and positions grew. Thus, Jeremiah, too, cried, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?"

Even the disciples of Jesus could not avoid abysses. Remember in Mark when they were sailing across the lake and the storm came up? The wind arose, the waves beat into the boat, and they panicked--with Jesus resting in the stern sheets! "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" And these were fishermen, whose lives were spent in boats and winds and seas.

Isn't this what we discover in Gethsemane? Jesus brought face to face with a deep, bottomless, immeasurable space. Aware of the ills of the world to which he had ministered; brought to this point in time by his voice, like John's, crying in a wilderness; Jesus was wracked by the comprehension of the realities of wrenching human suffering and human death; those sufferings and death which he had to undergo if he persisted in following his election. There were other options. Escape: the gospel tells us that he had once before departed from the scene when the locals became incensed. Cease ministering and become an unknown craftsman in some obscure village. Move to another country and speak out against the ailments of the homeland--from safety. Jesus' soul was agonized unto death; and he prayed that if it were at all possible, if in any way, the coming event might be bypassed. He asked God, of whom all things were possible, to

remove the cup--a cup whose contents, like a motionless pond, reflected but one image--Jesus!

Kazantzakis, writing in Report to Greco, the book which summarizes his life, his search and beliefs, says: "There are three kinds of souls, three kinds of prayers. One: I am a bow in your hands, Lord. Draw me lest I rot. Two: Do not overdraw me Lord. I shall break. Three: Overdraw me, and who cares if I break! Choose!"

In other words, twitch me a little, God, just to be sure I'm breathing. But, not too big a trial, God, I'm only human. Or, I welcome the full testing, God, for that is the reason for which I was created. To step into the abyss; anxious about its contents, yes; yet neither afraid of the step nor of the other side. Are not these the deeps which the Jesus of Kazantzakis faced; the ones into which Sunshine and Joe Roth peered; the chasms which we encounter each moment of our lives; the seemingly immeasurable abyss over which Jesus agonized in Gethsemane?

In The Last Temptation of Christ, Jesus, once again becoming aware of the terrible pains in his hands, feet, and heart, breaks through the imagining: "He was alone. The yard and house, the trees, the village doors, the village itself--all had disappeared.... His head quivered. Suddenly he remembered where he was, who he was and why he felt pain. A wild indomitable joy took possession of him... Everything had turned out as it should, glory be to God.... And it was as though he had said: Everything has begun."

Sunshine refuses to give up her leg--and she dies. But if the viewer watched with discerning eyes, it is not her death that is remembered, but the joys of child and mother discovering, sharing and caring. Those are the things that are carried forward, which give substance to the child's growing. And Joe Roth, as evidenced by the eulogies of fellow players, students, friends, is recalled as one who, in the midst of a growing certainty that his life's finitude was far briefer than the norm, gave 110% to the living of each day. Death was not denied--but it is the twenty-one years of activity, the giving even into death which will be recalled.

In Job, God responds by outlining all the wonders of creation; wonders which were, are, and shall continue to be in spite of the seeming inequities of which Job complains. And Job says, "Behold, I am of small account;... I know that Thou canst do all things and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted." Jeremiah lived to see his prophecies fulfilled, was justified by the victories of God over an unrepentant people. Job did not curse God and die; he stepped into the abyss, confronted God and discovered the real source of meaning. And we all know the story had a happy ending. Jeremiah, too, did not skirt the deep, but followed God's calling even into the pits of seeming emptiness. And what was Jesus' response to the disciples? He calmed the seas, then said to the cowering disciples, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

Jesus did not avoid the deep. His Gethsemane prayer ends, "Yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt." For as painful as the entry into the abyss was, there was something greater on the other side: unity with the living God, a God who is greater than the abyss, who is the underlying support in the abyss, who can be man's concrete concern. The decision was Jesus'; but it is apparent that he never gave serious consideration to the other abyss--avoiding options. Oh yes, he fights, he despairs, he cries out. But as Kazantzakis writes, "When, at last, the hour approaches for me to pluck the fruit of disciplined exercise, sweetness pervades my heart, silence and rest." There is pain in the cross; but that which exists beyond the cross has greater compensation. The strength of Jesus is sustained by the power of God, a power which has the ability to achieve God's purpose.

We, too, are assured of being recipients of that strength, of deriving the power of God which enables us to step into and endure our personal abysses. The handicapped high school girl wrote, "My sun is up and singing; I'm happy and glad I'm here. Don't bust my sun, please." Despite being physically restricted, despite being denied the activities open to the usual teen-aged girl, her sun sang and she found joy in life. And let not humans bust that sun!

In God, I moved through my abyss. Though knuckles were white and knees shaky, the midnight transfer was carried out--and the crewman survived to man another ship. And I dis-

covered personal capabilities which helped me meet further challenges, enter more abysses.

Bills can be paid, though it may mean juggling budgets, extending payments, asking for time. Maybe a new job isn't as important as the solidity of family, friends, church, life where we are. Someone steps up and offers to be the helpmate of the elderly--to take care of the cleaning, cooking, shopping; or the nursing home isn't the dreaded place it seemed to be. Maybe even the box seats at the ball game can be used after all. The point is that we want to avoid these abysses--when in reality we should be prepared to enter in, to grapple with the problems, to confront the God of power, and thus to pass through to partake of the joy, the silence, the singing sun on the other side.

Weatherhead writes, "An element of conflict is essential to the progress of the soul." If we avoid the abysses, if we skip around the perimeters, we never test our faith, we never seek the power which God continuously holds out to us. And if we turn back from the brink, the soul stagnates and we become empty husks, chaff driven before secular winds.

The cross is always judged by the person standing behind it; and one cannot take that place unless the abyss is entered. Jesus took the step. Joe Roth took the step. The handicapped student took the step. And so can and should we. For "no sin, no self-deception, no sickness, no uncertainty can ever take man beyond the reach of God's searching, testing judgment, with the possibility that he might respond and live."

Abysses will always appear in our lives. But we must enter into them with faith. Unless we do, we will deny ourselves the rite of passage--passage into the life of the cross, a passage Christ illuminated for us in the mandate of Gethsemane.

As James wrote, "Blessed is the man who endures trial; for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life."

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The reality of that which those who profess a belief and faith in God face in the days of their living is never hidden in the story that the Canon contains. Though we might wish to pass through our individual lives without encountering the abyss, the words which the Church has come to revere as indicative of the call and the challenge confront us with the bare fact that we must always be inundated by the elements of the soul's choice and struggle. And while the initial impression one receives when staring into the void may appear as one without hope, it is in one's faith that the ingredients exist for living through and beyond the abyss.

For the Christian, there is the freedom of choice and the responsibility of decision, and God meets men dramatically, which is to say, He meets them in crisis. ... Our destiny, therefore, is always being determined by a series of actions--a series of dramas.¹

The Bible is dramatic because it speaks to the reader and the listener now, not of the events from a historic or storied past, but of the circumstances of our being. The persons and predicaments of Jesus did not vanish, tucked away in the tomb with his body. They are about us on every side, filling our lives with the drama and actions which have continued beyond the cross. This is what Kazantzakis presents

¹Gerald Kennedy, His Word through Preaching (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 25.

to us. The reality of living; and the potentiality that lies in and beyond the chasms which run throughout our days. The writings of Kazantzakis, like the Bible, are also dramatic for they, too, speak to the reader now. The events which he wrote about are still living in persons' minds, and the things which he studied so intensely are eternal.

For, despite the enormous advances which our intellectual and technological enterprises have achieved, we continue to live on the brink. Whether we turn to the panaceas of industry or to our internal selves under the aegis of the 'new' psychological gurus, we cannot be unaware that things are tearing at the edges, that the center is somewhat unstable, that the abyss gaps in our path. Yet there is something which lies beyond, something which can undergird each person's rite of passage. And in passage after passage of Kazantzakis' works, one encounters that sense of hope, that presence of a God who cares, shares, and loves.

When the traditional premises regarding the radical significance of things have collapsed and when, therefore, there is no longer any robust common faith to orient the imaginative faculties of men with respect to the ultimate mysteries of existence--when, in other words, the basic presuppositions of a culture have become just yawning question marks--then the literary artist is thrust upon a most desolate frontier indeed.²

And this is the place to which Kazantzakis came, the place from which he addresses us even now. As he looked about the world in which he lived, as he peered ahead at the

² Nathan A. Scott, The Broken Center (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 2 and 3.

world in which we live; as he tore aside the veils shading the times yet to be, Kazantzakis lifted on high the foundations upon which human common faith might build. Rather than curling in fetal position, or resting upon the level to which we had come in our individual climbs, he saw the need to continue the ascent. Desperate might be the straights, bloody the path, yet beyond it all lay reassurance, joy and peace.

This is the premise which the preacher must address. To offer sugar-coated platitudes about how we may rest from our labors because we believe in God is simple. The words come easily, and the lights in the hearer's eyes assure the minister that he is communicating. Telling it like it is seems to infer that what it is is just what we are satisfied with, the level to which we have risen with no effort. But "The sermon must speak to the world today in behalf of God."³ And God demands that we continue to ascend, that we enter anew into each abyss without fear or trepidation. Thus, like the artist, the preacher must be concerned not with the language of communication, but rather the language of communion.

It is that language into which an effort has been made to put a deep and authentic knowledge of what is involved in the life of free men, and it is, therefore, a language which invites us to reenter what Martin Buber calls "the world of I and Thou."⁴

I and Thou, God and me. These are not merely words on a page, labels in a liturgy, parts of a prayer. They are par-

³David Waite Yohn, The Contemporary Preacher and His Task (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 15.

⁴Scott, The Broken Center, 3.

ticipants in the act of living, partners in the struggle to bring beings into unity with Being itself. Words, liturgies and prayer are necessities of one's faith; but if they are all we have to succor us, then our spans must be empty indeed. For the world encompasses so much more--seeing, feeling, smelling, hearing. Are not the I and Thou, God and me even more present in these? These are the universals in which each of us shares. And "the universals of human experience become points at which God confronts us and makes Himself known. That recognition of God at work in our human situations can take place when preaching is real."⁵

Nikos Kazantzakis immersed himself in the universals again and again, and as often as his intellect sought to discover avenues by which mankind might determine the resolutions, he was ever confronted anew by the fact that God was at work in our personal situations. If we seemed to span one chasm by our human endeavors, another appeared wherein all our efforts were in vain. Something greater alone was able to help us rise to the task--to give us a view of what lies beyond the abyss. As was written of Augustine, "He was not writing for himself; he knows that others will read his books; but how can he cover up anything? For he was also writing in the presence of God, God right there beside him, from whom

⁵Gene E. Bartlett, The Audacity of Preaching (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 29

nothing can be hidden."⁶ Is that not also the predicament in which the minister must always be? God is right there beside us; and our thoughts, as well as our words, are open to his perusal. Do we not, then, stand condemned if we offer but panaceas, if we condone the level of our being, when the call is to climb higher?

That is the unique aspect of Kazantzakis for the minister. He had been immersed in the realm of mind; but he had also journeyed widely in the places where mankind lay broken, where humans no longer responded to the call. And he wove the mind and experiences into each piece of his literary achievements. Thus, to read lightly in Kazantzakis is worse than not reading him at all. For in cursory skimmings we elicit only those things in which we are already awash. Then inane snippets are appended to sermons as fillers, our 'intellectual' gleanings whereby the congregation is impressed. Ah, but to read Kazantzakis in depth; to pursue his lonely struggle to find reason in life, his persistent effort to confront the God who was present in all of life. Then one may discover a unique person and an enticing message which can deeply affect mankind's I-Thou understanding.

For the life of a nation, the life of all humanity can be affected by one individual's struggle.

...the cultural evolution of the life of a group can be profoundly affected by changes in the cultural evolution of the life of an individual, especially to the extent that such an individual departs from the conventional

⁶. Radoslov A. Tsanoff, Autobiographies of Ten Religious Leaders (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1968), 4.

aspirations of the group. A man's life gains value and becomes exemplary when in the course of fulfilling himself he happens to offer the group of which he has been a part the opportunity to fulfill itself.⁷

Was that not the effect of Jesus' ministry upon mankind? And that is the leverage which Kazantzakis offers to the preacher--the cultural evolution of his life as he saw the varying responses to the call to ascend, and realized the only response which met the call.

But what a strange place to find God, merged in the stories and poems of a man of letters. Particularly an author who time after time seemed to imply that God was of little import. Yet that is the error compounded through peripheral viewing. God is not always the overwhelming presence, the thundering voice, the terrifying image. He does not exist in Canon alone, nor in the silence of the sanctuary. God does appear in unseemly places: a bush, a rod, a cloud, a garden. But--if God can be perceived in these unlikely spots, then surely first He was seen in seemly places. "When any man thus finds God in unlikely places one may be fairly sure that he first found God in some likely places."⁸

That is the factor which critics overlook in analyzing Kazantzakis. He did discover God in likely places; and then he wove Him into the most unlikely seams in his

⁷. Brenden Gill, Lindbergh Alone (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 154.

⁸. Harry Emerson Fosdick, What Is Vital in Religion? (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 11.

works. That is why one must read the works in detail, to pierce the outer shell whereby to glean the golden harvest. That is why the minister must expand his reading and library, to include great literary works. For the entirety of an author's works provides his autobiography wherein we may discover God laboring in unlikely places.

The marvel of great autobiographies is that, in revealing the various recesses of the inmost self, they deepen and expand our humane understanding. And more; beneath the depth of character which we are probing we may see, or at any rate vaguely sense, still unsounded abysses. We get a baffling but also a challenging and a truly humanitarian recognition of boundless personality. Precisely in the field of religion this recognition is most important.⁹

While we must not discard the Bible, for it is therein that the reality of God is made manifest, we also cannot be blind to His presence in things more mundane. The attitude is far too often that literature has nothing to do with God --or more aptly, God has nothing to do with literature. Yet surely, as Fosdick noted, "sooner or later all of us come to the place where, if we are to find God at all, we must find him in a wilderness."¹⁰ If, then, mankind temporarily terminates his terminals to the word as Canonically contained, perhaps new channels can be opened through poetry and novels. While this is certainly a wilderness alien to the strictly Bible concept, once the thoughts of Kazantzakis begin to

⁹.Tsanoff, 9.

¹⁰.Fosdick, What Is Vital in Religion, 2.

flow through one's being, the presence of God cannot be denied.

In Toda Raba Kazantzakis wrote:

A military review, the general passing among the soldiers and staring point-blank at each of them individually. He was sorting them out, eliminating the cowards. "You are a coward", he would say to one of them, throw him out of the ranks, and pass on. All the soldiers were trembling. Geranos' turn came. The general stood before him and stared, for hours and hours he scrutinized him, his gaze piercing through Geranos' heart. "As for you," he finally said, "you can't fight on the left, because you keep looking also to the right. You can't fight on the right, because you keep looking also to the left. I don't know what to do with you. ... You irritate me! He grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him."¹¹

This is what Kazantzakis does to the reader. He forces us to confront him in all the details of his works. We become the general, irritated because he does not spell out the preconceived ideas in which we abound. We want God up there, separated from the trash of this life. We want him clean, pure, and filtered. Jesus would not accept a God absent from mankind's daily tasks. Nor did Kazantzakis allow that brand of type-casting to infiltrate his writings. God is present in and with even the most lowly of his personages (e.g. Dame Goody in The Odyssey). This is what preaching is about. While we must point far beyond the level at which each one of us now exists, we must ensure that we are ever aware of God's presence in every human being. And in that awareness, we must offer the courage, the strength and the love to press

¹¹. Nikos Kazantzakis, Toda Raba (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 138.

onwards. Abysses can be bridged; crosses can be borne, life can be shared.

When we come to the audacity of preaching, it is grounded in faith that we are not seeking to wrest from a reluctant God knowledge of Himself He has not willed to give. His Word already has gone out to the ends of the earth. Preaching knows that the winds of God blow where they will, but it affirms with confidence their certainty. Marcus Dods once said, "Seamen cannot raise the wind or direct its course, but they can put themselves in the way of the great regular winds."¹²

Thus I affirm that the works of Nikos Kazantzakis are one of the great regular winds which can give new direction to one's course of preaching. If it is a wilderness, let it be as Sinai was to Kazantzakis himself: "This treeless, waterless, inhuman ravine through which I was passing is the terrible sheath of Jehovah."¹³ To reach the meaning of Kazantzakis is to undergo the struggle which he underwent to arrive at the Monastery of Sinai--the manmade symbol of Moses' travail. It is a demanding journey, pages numbering like the sands of Sinai. But at the journey's end, one must surely echo Kalnouhas' and Kazantzakis' joyful cries: "Derr!" ("The monastery!") ... the purpose of our journey. I had so longed for this moment all my life, and now that I held the fruits of my great labors in my hands I rejoiced quietly, without speaking, and was in no hurry."¹⁴

¹². Bartlett, 25.

¹³. N. Kazantzakis, Journeying (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 91.

¹⁴. Ibid., 99.

Be in no hurry to preach from Kazantzakis. Hold the fruits of his labors in your hands, rejoice quietly, and someday speak of God who brought Moses, Jesus, and even Nikos Kazantzakis into His presence. But speak the language of communion so that the eyes which light up also echo the cry, Derr!

There is a scene in Pilgrim's Progress in which, "from the swirling waters, Pilgrim's guide called back: "Be of good cheer, my brothers; for I have touched the bottom and it is sound."¹⁵ That is what exists in and beyond the abyss! A firm bottom, and it is sound. That is the note upon which Kazantzakis ends The Odyssey: "Forward, my lads, sail on, for Death's breeze blows in a fair wind."¹⁶ And that is the demand for our preaching if mankind is to pass through the abyss and ascend.

¹⁵•Merril R. Abbey, Living Doctrine in a Vital Pulpit, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 184.

¹⁶•N. Kazantzakis, The Odyssey, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), 775.

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